Heartstrings (short stories naman ^^v)
by JhingBautista

mga short stories na nagawa ko na dati. ung iba kadadagdag ko lang. basahin nyo minsan ^^,

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Prologues...

Maybe I should've given more thought to this. whaha... edit edit ulet ^^,

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Two Tears of Friendship--a short story about regret for a broken friendship and a budding love. Ikaw ba naman ang kung kelan mo pinakawalan yung tao... saka mo nalaman kung gano sya kaimportante. Nakakapagsisi di ba? Tapos hindi mo na alam kung pano sya makukuha ulet... *sigh*

Roses in Her Memory--This is a story about feelings being confessed, reciprocated and wasted because of jealous childhood sweetheart.

Just Another Jane--It was sort of like a letter, a confession and a story rolled into one. Madali na lang kase ang lahat kapag naka-move on ka na. Haha.. Relate

much ^^,

April Romance--Eto ay produkato ng pagkamiss ko sa isang tao na nameet ko sa uzzap. I never knew his name. Pero tuwang-tuwa ako sa kanya. Nakakapanghinayang lang na hindi ko man lang sya nakilala... :(

Kismet (The Beginning)--Kwento ng isang masungit na babae na nakahanap ng lalaking mamahalin nya through her friends and a lot of souffle helpings. Haha... dati ganyan akong mag-isip...

Kismet (It Gets Complicated)--Continuation lang nung kismet one.

Save You--This is the product of my gloominess na bigla ko na lang naitype at iniyakan ko ng saglet with the help of the music Save You by Simple Plan. I don't know if this happens a lot but it kinda makes me sad that there's a glimmer of hope but nobody gave her a chance to continue hioping...

Amats (one shot slurred confession)--Matagal ko na 'tong nasimulan eh. Nahalukay ko lang sa laptop ko. Haha... natutuwa lang ako sa idea ng kalasingan. Pampalakas talaga sya ng loob ^^,

Impromptu Elevator Ride--it's about an unexpected thing that this woman expects to happen but never assumed that it actually would but it did. :) Magulo ba? Try reading it.

Bless the Pee--How many times do you pee in a day? XD

Promise Ring--cliche na story ng mag-best friend. Try reading it. You may or may not like it. :)

First Love- “Love is a word too strong to be uttered early... but too beautiful to say too late.” -The Morning Rush Top Ten

When He's Not Looking--Paano ba magkagusto sa isang taong tipikal?

Oh ayan... magdadagdag din ako ng desc kapag may nadagdag akong story dito. basahin nyo wah? TY! ^_____^

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TWO TEARS OF FRIENDSHIP

--pinagawa sa 'kin 'to as a project ata? haha... basta 'yun.

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Friendship and love once meet at the crossroad of life. Neither of them wanted to give way to the other. Friendship said: “Let me pass! I am more important than you. You always tend to fade while I won’t.” Love refused to heed. She said: “People need me more.”

The argument went through all day until Time came passing by and saw the two. Being the wisest among all being, he was respected and beloved by everybody. He said: “You two don’t always get along, do you? But I’ll say this to you. Once you both learned to be in sync, you’ll be the most powerful beings on Earth.”

Both their eyes lit up. “Really?”

Time nodded and smiled. “But it only happens for a very few lucky individuals. And the two of you would always tend to clash. One has to give way eventually..” After saying this, he left them both to ponder these thoughts.

I have always loved Jude. He had been my tissue, my bank, my friend, kuya and all around alalay. We have been best friends since as long as I can remember. Many have even thought that we’re together. Sometimes, we let them believe that so no one would bother us. You see, many guys have tried to court be before and frankly, I grew tired of it. With Jude on my side, guys tend to stay away. I’m happy with it. And Jude doesn’t mind.

I have always loved Jude..but as a friend..and nothing more than that. The problem started to arise when Jude told me what he really feels.

“I love you Ybeth. Will you be my girl?” He whispered. I looked up into his eyes..his pair of chocolate-brown eyes that causes hysterics among the girls in our school. I searched for a sign that can tell me what the hell is going on. And she saw it..he’s gone crazy.

“J-jude—“

“I have always loved you, Ybeth. Didn’t you ever notice that?”

If I am to admit that I didn’t, how would he react? I’ve never thought that his gestures meant anything other than care and concern. I thought that we’re brothers and sisters. A strong thing binds us together but I never thought that it’s different for him than it is for me.

If I tell him that I don’t feel the same way, he’d let me go. But I don’t want to lose him for it would break my heart. What should I do?

“You don’t have to answer me right away. I’ll give you time to think.” He kissed me goodbye. As he was opening our front yard gate, he said “Tomorrow. Give me your answer.”

I didn’t sleep well that night. I had a lot of things in mind but I didn’t get a chance to do them all because I was laying in bed on night, thinking.

At school, Jude greeted me with an expectant smile. I smiled back.

“So?” He inquired. “What now?”

“The answer is ‘yes’.”

Upon hearing those words, he jumped around, victorious. I was quite embarrassed because we’re starting to get people’s attention. Jude however, didn’t mind. I guess he became oblivious of the fact that other people exist besides me.

He finally stopped and held my hand. “I promise that you will never regret this. I love you Ybeth.”

“I....I l-love you..too.” I stammered. I’ve decided already that I’d give us a chance. Maybe it’ll work out. I’ve known people experienced the same thing. And since I have no one special to me but him, I guess he’s worth the risk.

Jude kept on showering me with gifts and kisses. He’s so sweet. He was sweet before as a friend, but as a lover, it was quite too much. And after two months of being together, I feel like I can’t do this anymore. So on our second monthsary, I mustered up my courage to tell him.

“I have a surprise for you!” He said so enthusiastically that it made me hold my tongue. Later, I’ll tell him, I said to myself.

“W-what is it?”

He smiled. “Silly. If I tell you now, it wouldn’t be a surprise anymore.”

I forced a smile. “What is it Jude?”

He sighed and held up a tiny box with a bow on top. Oh no. An alarm blared on my mind. He doesn’t have to tell me what’s inside. I already know.

“I’ve never been in love with another woman and I know I never will. Ever since the day we met, I have been in love with you. I befriended you because of that. I have always treasured our friendship but I feel like, by just that, any guy could take you away..”

“But it’s too early—“

“I know. Don’t worry..we’ll still finish college and get a job. I’ll wait forever, if that’s the amount of time you need.”

“What will my parents say?”

He smiled. “I’ve already talked to them. They love me, Ybeth. And they’ want you to be with me rather than with some stranger.”

“You have this planned before, don’t you?”

“Yes. I’ve lost count of the times that I imagined this. And you saying yes to me..”

“Jude, no.”

“..and then we’ll get married and have our cute, little kids—wait. WHAT?”

I heaved a sigh. “I can’t do this anymore. I’m sorry but I have to end this.”

His handsome face contorted. “You know what? Let’s just forget about this. Let’s pretend it never happened, alright?”

“No. It did happen. I can’t pretend otherwise.”

“ Ybeth..”

“Jude. I’m breaking up with you.” I spit the words like they were the dirtiest. He was taken aback. His face lost its color. I bit my tongue. “I have never been in love with you and I never will. Let’s just go back to being friends.”

His face grim while he said. “No. It’s this or nothing, Ybeth.”

My shoulders slumped. “D-don’t do this Jude.”

“You started it.” He said in a stern voice. He never used that voice to me. Now I wanted to regret my decision..but..I don’t want to be pushed around.

“Jude I..I’m sorry..”

He nodded. “Goodbye then.” He said and walked away. I slumped on the chair and stared at the box on the table. “So this is goodbye?” I asked myself as I felt two fat tears rolled down my eyes.

We never became best friends again. It was like we get back to being the strangers we once were. He never went to my house anymore. I’ve tried to talk to him a thousand times but he refused to give me a chance.

A month after our breakup, I saw him with Drisdy. She’s the cheer captain in our school and has always loved Jude. She had been begging for his love for quite a long time. Now she finally gets what she wants.

I stared at them, wondering why there’s this feeling in my gut. Like a fat lizard just crawled its way in my stomach. I bit my lip as I watch them eating ice cream. I suddenly remembered that moment. When I used to eat ice cream with him. He’d choose vanilla and I’d want chocolate. And then we’d playfully smear each other’s faces with it...

Jude looked my way as if he expected me to be looking. Our eyes met..and for the first time, I felt a surge of electricity run its course through my veins. The thing that they call sparks. I never thought I’d feel it..with him. More so, I never thought that it would be too late.

I looked away as my tears came crashing down like the cascades of the waterfall. And now, sitting here alone on our favorite bench, feeling his eyes burn a hole on my back, I wonder...did I make the right choice?

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ROSES IN HER MEMORY

Project namin 'to sa humanities. Haha... Pasensya na kung may mali mang grammar. XD

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Losing the love that you have always treasured all your life is the gravest thing that could ever happen to you. When Fate decided to play a trick on you; when it catches you off guard; when it takes away the life out of you; when everything hurts, there will come a time that you’ll be wishing that you have never loved at all. Somehow, you’d rather not have it, than to have it then lose it in the end. What’s worse is, when it won’t leave your memory. And you have to live just to remember how good it felt, how happy you once were and how it can’t be anymore.

“Cynthia?”, came a voice. I tried to open my eyes but the lights blinded me. I feel like I was drifting. I’m seeing flashes of memories inside my head. My parents. My siblings. My friends. Robert.

3 years ago...

Among the four of us, I alone, have no boyfriend. I have seen my friends fall in and out of love a thousand times. I envy them so much. How come I don’t get a boyfriend? Why do I have to suffer the curse of being single?

They’ve also asked me these questions. They thought that I was just being pihikan. But the truth is, I don’t even have a suitor. But the thought that my Mr. Right isn’t just here yet keeps me going. I know he’s on his way. Maybe he just took the longer road.

When Jane broke off with her “boyfriend”—if she could even call him that—she brought us to a club near Eastwood. I’m not really a clubby person but I went too. I hate being called a killjoy.

I regretted my decision instantly. The three of them kept on pushing me to some guys. Some said ‘hi’ and went on to check out Jane. Some of them talked to me and got bored. Ls it my fault that I’m only animated when it comes to Arts and History? Why do they have to be such an ass?

I went on to find my three great friends to say that I have to go. The ‘I have to go’ part is always the hardest part for me.

“Why?! It’s still too early!!!” Christy blurted out.

“I have to do my project. You know naman Mr. Raulo, right? You know how mean he is to me. I really have to impress him this time.”An excuse I find so convenient to use. It’s true that I have a project but it’s not due until next week. He-he.

“Liar.” Lalaine gritted her teeth. She’s such a mind-reader. As a psychology student, I often find it hard to be around her. She always read me like a book. And you’re probably wondering why such a chick took up such a boring subject as psychology. I’ve asked her that too. Know what she said?

“I want to be able to read the boy’s mind. I want to get into their heads so that I will be, every bit, a perfect girl for them.”

Major flirt. Pfff.

“Guys, I really have to go. My head hurts!”I made an exaggerated in-pain face.

“Fine, go ahead. KJ!!”

“Yeah! You go ahead. You’re such a FRIEND!”Jane said with sarcasm.

It’s not that I’m not crushing on anybody. The truth is, I have been loving someone secretly..for so many years now. Well, just two long years to be exact.

His name is Robert. It was at the very first day that I laid my eyes on him that I knew I had fallen to that deep hole a lot of people had fallen into. And I waited for two long years for him to make a move. Two years...that I have been constantly imagining his arms wrapped around me; his smile whenever he sees me. But I guess I grew tired of waiting for him. So I went on with my life, waiting for a new man—my Mr. Right.

One day though, and I find it very odd, I saw a long-stemmed red rose taped on my locker. I thought at first that somebody might’ve mistaken me for somebody else. I saw a note that’s attached to it.

To Cynthia,

Whose smile brightens up my gloomy day. J

The sender is anonymous. I’ve got a secret admirer!

My friends all giggled when they heard about this. They also planned to ask every guy at school if any of them has a crush on me. (Which I readily object!)

The next day...

Another long-stemmed red rose is taped at my locker. And along with it is a note.

To Cynthia,

Who never fails to render me speechless.

Roses came after another..it went on and on until I have learned to love the person behind the scheme. It’s like it became a part of my life..those roses.

“So, who’s he?”Christy acquired.

“I don’t know.”I admitted.

“Girl, this can’t go on forever. Aren’t you a little concerned that this guy still remains a mystery to you until now?”

I shrugged. A hadn’t really thought about it.

“OMG! What if he’s so ugly?”Lalaine blurted out.

“Maybe that’s why he hadn’t shown up his face. Maybe that’s why he wants to stay in the dark.” Jane agreed.

No. NO! “You guys can’t ruin this. Get those thought off your heads!”

They looked at me sympathetically. “Let’s face it Cynthia. If he has nothing to hide, then he’ll come out in the open, right? Just think about it girl.”

God, please let him be the right one for me.

I stuck a note at my locker that says, “If you’re really sincere about what you say you feel about me, please let me know who you are.”

And then the next day...no rose at my locker.

And also the days after that—no more roses. I got really disappointed.

A week has passed and still no rose. Why do I keep on hoping?

I stared at my locker, hoping that it would magically produce a rose...a note..and maybe...him.

“Cynthia?” came a voice behind me.

I turned around to see Robert eyeing me intently.

“The bell rang five minutes ago. Why are you still out here?”He asked.

I smiled at him. “Maybe I’m just fantasizing a rose to pop out of my locker.”

He smiled at me too and said, ”Well, maybe it’s inside.”He suggested.

Bewildered, I opened my locker and saw not one, not two, but a dozen long-stemmed roses. I looked at him, amused.

“No note this time...” I said.

“That’s because I am really sincere about what I feel about you Cynthia. And I want you to know that the person behind those roses really does exist and that what he feels for you is real. It has no note this time because that guy finally had the courage to tell you in person how great you are; how your smile brightens up his gloomy days; how you always render him speechless; how your voice melts him like a hot knife on butter.” He smiled.

“W-wha---”

“..how you became his dreams, his goal, his aspirations; how your scent becomes the air he breathes; how he sees you as the woman he’d love to spend the rest of his life with. How he...how he wants you to be his girl...right here. Right now. No buts. No ifs. Just say YES...please?”

Right then and there, I became his girl. I was so happy that I was afraid my heart would just jump out of my chest.

We’ve just had our anniversary when Samantha, Robert’s childhood sweetheart, arrived from America and went on to see him. Samantha is the epitome of glamour and sophistication...in a level which I am not likely to achieve. Though Robert says that they’re just good friends, I can’t help but be alarmed. This woman can make

any man hers with just a flick of her finger. And being his childhood sweetheart, I’m afraid of the possibility that she would take him away from me.

But I was proven wrong eventually. Samantha always assures me that she and Robert are just friends. And as time goes by, she made me realize that there’s really nothing to be jealous about.

Time sure flies by so fast. Robert and I graduated that year and both of us soon found a job. When he was reassigned to Qatar, Robert proposed to me before his flight. He flew the next day. When Samantha learned about his proposal, she gave me a red Cadillac as a gift. I didn’t know that she was this extravagant. I tried to refuse her gift but she insisted.

“C’mon. Test it on the road”, she suggested.

I readily agreed.

I climb up at the driver’s seat and drove the car away. I was about to halt when I noticed that the breaks aren’t working.

I tried to slow it down but I can’t. I hit a tree. I tried to raise my head up above. Dark clouds started to form...

I woke up to see my family and friends around me.

“Cynthia...”

I looked up to see their faces. “What happened?”

“You had an accident dear.”My mom said.

“Wha—how did it happen? I remembered driving Sam’s Cadillac---”

“She set you up.”Jane said with anger in her voice.

I looked at her in disbelief.

Christy backed her up. “It’s true Cyn. Samantha admitted it herself. She did that because she’s still very much in love with Robert. She wants you gone.”

“And Rob?” I asked.

They all looked at each other. “Sweetie, I think its best you rest first.” My mom suggested.

“Mom...where is he? Did you tell him what happened to me?”

“Cyn...I...yes I told him.”

“Then where is he?”

“When he learned about what happened to you, he immediately booked a flight. The airlines won’t let him because of the storm so he flew a jet instead. Unfortunately for him, the storm threw his jet off course. It...crashed. His body was found yesterday...”

At that moment, I felt like my world had stopped turning. It felt like something inside me had died. I thought that I was going to spend the rest of my life with him but it turned out that I would spend the rest of my lifetime alone.

Cynthia never got married. She believes that she already found her soul mate. And now that he’s gone, it’s as if he took with him her heart, preventing her from feeling that feeling again. She believes that she had nothing left to give to somebody else.

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APRIL ROMANCE

...for that someone I met last last summer. :(

in memory of tooooooooooooooot XD

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I missed you..

It was April 2010 when I met the guy whom until now I can’t forget. Summer noon. A boring one. I enrolled on a summer camp to try out new things. At para hindi na rin ako nabo-bore sa bahay. Nakakasawa na rin ‘yung panay kain at tulog...

I entered the camp alone. Ewan ba...it was the first time that I tried a thing without anybody I know. Minsan din kase..nakakasawa ng laging sila...naghahanap ako ng kaibigan. Nagpaparami. Kase, minsan naghahanap rin ako ng mga taong marunong makibagay sa ugali ko. Mahirap na, baka bigla nila akong iwan. Mabuti na ‘yung maraming options.

What’s cool and unusual about this camp is that they don’t use their real names. May code names kumbaga. So we have to come up with a cool nickname.

On the first day of camp, natipon ang lahat ng participants sa isang malaking open space. Outdoor space. I kept on hearing gibbers and giggles. Mukhang hindi lang ako ang excited...

The head councilor raised his hand, signaling us to be quiet. We obliged. “Camping is for fun. We came out here for fun..and learning. Nandito tayo to meet new friends. Right guys?”

Lots of agreement followed.

“So..today we will have our first activity. As you can see, may mga papers and pencils tayo sa mga table sa gilid.” He pointed at the said objects on our left. “What I want you to do now..is to pick one of each. Orderly. And talk to the people around you. Your fellow campers. Then..you should write their names on the papers. The ones that you liked put a smiley. The ones that you’re initially attracted to, put a heart. The ones that you didn’t like put a cross.”

Murmurs and whispers followed. He raised his hand again and we fell quiet.

“At the end of the day, we will tally all the names. We’ll see after kung sino ang pinaka-cordial, pinaka-attractive at pinaka—well, unlikable. Shhhh. I know you’re all excited..so..could you please form an orderly line? And please remember..do not

change your code names. And don’t tell your real name. It will be revealed in time...Councilors..please supervise.”

And that..was the beginning of a beautiful mayhem. We were over 100..so it’s no surprise kung magkagulo kami.

“Ouch!” I cried. The guy in front of me accidentally stomped at my foot.

“Sorry Miss! Okay ka lang?”

I looked at this ebony guy with a bright eyes. “O-okay lang.”

Suddenly entranced, I didn’t even realize that we were on the front of the line already.

“Ahm...ikaw na.” I said to him. That was the only time that he turned around. We both had our papers and pencils. I walked away from the rest of the crowd...horrified. I was never good at meeting people. Where do I start? Suddenly, all of them looked snooty..

“Hi.”

I looked at ebony guy again.

“Hi.”

He smiled, revealing a perfect set of white teeth. A great contrast to his skin tone. “Pwedeng makipagkilala?”

“Y-yah..I’m Chrome. Ikaw?” I held out my hand.

He took it..and I was electrified. “I’m Coal.”

Dali-dali kong binawi ang kamay ko. There was something there that I can’t quite name. And I’m terrified.

“Sorry kanina ah.”

I gave him a quick smile. “Wala ‘yun.”

“Ilang taon ka na?”

“Nineteen.”

“Great! I’m nineteen too!”

“Talaga? Wow. What a coincidence.”

Napatawa sya. I take it he didn’t hear the sarcasm in my voice. “So. Wala kang kilala dito?”

“Meron na. Ikaw.”

“Ako lang?”

“Yah. Eh ikaw?”

“Ikaw lang din.” His expression jubilant.

“Ayaw mong makipagkilala sa iba?”

“Hindi na. Ikaw lang naman ang gusto kong makilala eh.”

The expression, ‘My heart is jumping right out of my chest’ now implies to the hyper activity inside of mine.

“B-bakit naman?”

“Wala. You just looked interesting.”

“Talaga? Apparently, you and everybody don’t share the same interest.”

“Okay lang. At least solo kita.”

Nag-init ang mukha ko. Is this guy hitting on me? Already?!

“Joke lang. Ikaw naman, namula kaagad.” Natatawa nyang sabi.

Hmm...so that was a joke. Suddenly, I felt a jolt of anger.

“Sige. I’ll see you later.” Nakangiti nyang paalam sa ‘kin. Then he wrote my name on his paper. Gusto ko sanang makita kung anong inilagay nyang sign..kaso umalis sya agad.

“Hi.” Came a voice behind me. I turned around to see three girls.

“Hello.” I replied politely.

“Chrome right? I’m Celeste.” She held out her hand. “These are Batsy and Quinn. Not our real names of course.”

We exchange pleasantries. They then headed off to meet other people while I wrote their names..and put on a smiley beside each.

From then on, Cel and her friends kept me company. Occasionally, Coal would show up. But it’s not too often that I terribly miss him in his absence.

Once, nagkaroon ng dancing, singing and art lectures and seminars. Since parehong kaliwa ang paa ko and I sing like a frog, I decided that art class would be the safest for me. ‘Yun nga lang, I’m more of a sculptor than a painter...

After class, Coal went up to me and handed me his work. It was the exact replica of me, kunot din ang noo sa kakaisip kung ano’ng magandang i-drawing. Ang hirap kase ‘pag freehand..nakaka-stress.

“Wow. Drawing mo ba ‘to talaga?!”

He smiled then nodded.

“Sa ‘kin na lang to ah.”

Umiling sya at kinuha ang papel sa kamay ko. “Hindi pwede.”

I pouted at him. But still, he didn’t give me what I wanted. I sighed..marami pa namang time para magpa-drawing sa kanya....

I woke up, sweating under the blanket. Tiningnan ko ang orasan ko. 2:28 a.m. pa lang. ‘Yun pala ang side effect ng sobrang aga matulog.

I decided to get out para magpahangin. It was so dark outside..buti na lang maliwanag ang buwan..

I heard a shoosh from behind me.

My heart stuttered. Baka makakita ako ng multo! I was terrified of ghosts pa naman...Suddenly, a cold had landed on my bare shoulder. I jumped and muffled a scream....

“Hey..” A familiar voice called out. Dahan-dahan akong lumingon, only to find a smiling Coal bahind me.

“Ano ba! Muntik na ‘kong atakihin sa puso!” Paasik kong sabi sa kanya..while I continually punch his shoulder.

“Sorry.” Natatawa nyang sabi. It made me punch harder. “Aray naman!” He caught my hands with his left hand at pinitik ang noo ko. Napasapo ako sa sakit.

“Haha..masakit ba?”

I glared at him. “Tingin mo?!”

Then his next action took me by surprise. Hinila nya ako..then he started kissing my forehead. My knees weakened, so I held onto him for support. Then he wrapped his arms around me and pulled me in a tight embrace. I sighed, thinking that I could get used to this...

So, every crack of dawn, pinipilit kong bumangon ng maaga para maulit ang mga pangyayaring ‘yon. Every day..kaso hindi na naulit. In the end, nag-aaksaya lang ako ng oras na dapat sanay itutulog ko pa...

Treasure hunt.

We were divided into 5 groups. I was separated from Cel. Darn! Wala na naman akong kasundo. Mahaba haba pa namang hanapan ang gagawin namin. One day day ang maku-consume. In the end, all the groups would meet up near the lake house to make a bonfire.

Ang hirap! One time, muntik na ‘kong madulas sa batuhan. Lucky for me, a savior came by.

“Okay ka lang Miss?”

A guy with chinky eyes kept me from falling.

“Yah. Thanks.”

He smiled..making his eyes look like a couple of slits. “Welcome.” He helped me regain my composure. “I’m Rain. You are?”

“Chrome.”

“Ah. Nice to meet you.”

“Same goes here.”

He helped me through the rest of the course. Finally, we met up with the other group.

When I saw Coal, my heart skipped a beat again. It’s like...every time. He was crabby and unsmiling. Bad trip ata.

“Hi Coal.” I called out.

He made a face. “Hi! I’m Rain. And you are?!” He mimicked.

“Ano’ng problema mo?”

“Wala!” And then he rejoined his team.

“Boyfriend mo ba ‘yun?”

Lumingon ako sa nagtanong. Si Batsy pala. Dumating na rin ang group nila.

“Hindi ah.”

“Hindi daw..eh bakit ganun kayo?”

“Ano’ng ganun?” I asked..confused.

“Wala.” She smiled mysteriously.

The bonfire was really priceless. Everybody was singing campfire songs. Tapos may mga marshmallow kami sa stick. It was an experience of a lifetime! Sayang nga lang wala akong camera. All throughout the night, Coal was looking at me from the opposite side. And all throughout the night, my heart was in frenzy...

When finally it’s time to end, he walked towards me..smiling.

“Hi.” He said.

“Hi.” I replied.

Dead silence followed.

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“Wala ka bang sasabihin?” Naiirita kong tanong sa kanya.

“Wala...except for the fact that I’m so glad I met you..and that I like you a lot. Aside from that..no,,wala akong sasabihin.” He smirked, took a bite at my mallows and walked away.

The day after..I didn’t get a chance to see him. And then the day after..until days turned to weeks. And before I knew it, it was our last day on camp.

We submitted our papers to be tallied. I was so depressed, I didn’t even bother going there, to hear the announcement. Nagpangalumbaba ako sa harapan ng cabin..

“Chrome?”

I looked around, expectant. I couldn’t hide my disappointment when I realized that it’s just Cel.

“Bakit?”

“May nagpapabigay nito oh. Actually, noong nag-treasure hunt pa tayo nyan eh.

Nakalimutan ko lang ibigay. I suddenly remembered noong nagpasa tayo ng papel.”

“Kanino galing?”

“Some guy. Hindi ko natanong ‘yung pangalan eh.”

I immediately knew it was from him. “Thanks.”

“Ahm..Chrome..”

“Bakit?”

She handed me another sheet of paper. “Here’s our real names.. and my contact number. I hope we’ll continue to be friend even outside camp.” She said, smiling.

“Thanks..friend.”

“Aw..pa-hug nga.” She hugged me tight. “I’ll miss you..”

“I will miss you too.” I assured her.

“Sige. Babalik na ‘ko doon at baka magkaiyakan pa tayo.”

After she left, I opened the folded paper. It had a huge heart drawn with a single name written inside. My name...

I didn’t see him after all that. I guess he’s too afraid of goodbyes. Siguro may girlfriend na sya outside camp. Siguro, he thinks of me as just an occasional fling. There’re so many questions that I want to ask him. Damn! I don’t even know his real name...

I went to the following camps after that. Every April of the last three years, pabalik-balik ako don. Hoping that he’d come back too. Hoping that he too, wants to see me again. Hoping that, I might even know his name.

Hoping...that it doesn’t just end there....

.

.

.

I still miss you....Coal. :(

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Kismet (The Beginning)

pinakauna kong story..pinaka-nakaka-relate ako. ^____^

Cambria never had a boyfriend. Not even once. It’s not that she doesn’t believe in love, feeling kase nya hindi sya deserving sumaya. She got used to being miserable kase ang tagal na nyang naghihintay..pero walang dumarating. Para bang sinanay na nya ang sariling mag-isa. Naisip nya kase na mas mabuti na yung walang iniintindi at umiintindi sa’yo. At least, she won’t feel the hurt when something good ends.

Pero parang gusto nyang suwayin ang sariling principles ng makita ang isang cute na lalaki sa National Bookstore. She couldn’t help but stare at him. He has the most beautiful hair she’d ever seen. Mahaba ang kulot na buhok ng lalaki na halos umabot sa balikat nito. Mejo mahaba din ang bangs nito na nakakatakip sa mata nito. She wanted to take a peek at his eyes but she couldn’t see past through the bangs! Napansin siguro ng lalaki na kanina pa nya ito tinitingnan. He looked at her and smirked. He’s probably used to woman ogling him. She guiltily looked away and pretends to surf the shelves. Maya-maya ay nilapitan sya ng lalaki.

“Hi!” bati nito sa kaya.

“Hello.” She responded..still searching the shelves.

“I saw you looking at me.”He bluntly commented.

Kapal! She decided to cross him off her imaginary list. If there’s one thing that

could turn her off, it’s a guy being cocky.

“So? Masama bang tumingin?” Mataray nyang pagkakasabi.

He grinned. God! What a perfect set of teeth! “Don’t get embarrassed.” Wala na syang maisagot kaya tinalikuran na lang nya ito at nagpunta sa cashier para magbayad ng kung anong librong nahugot nya. She didn’t even realize na kasunod nya na ito. “Ang sungit mo naman.”

Nilingon nya ito. “So? Masama bang magsungit?”

“Buti na lang maganda ka.” A comment that made her smile inside. Malas lang dahil mahaba ang pila, hindi tuloy sya makaalis-alis.

“I’m Justine nga pala. Eh ikaw?”

“I’m someone who’s not interested in you.” Pairap nyang sagot. Napatawa ng mahina ang lalaki. “Alam mo, kung ganyan ka kasungit, hindi ka magkakaboyfriend. Sige ka!” Pananakot nito sa kanya.

“At sino namang may sabi sa’yong wala akong boyfriend?”

Kumunot ang noo ni Justine. “Bakit, meron ba?”

“Meron.” Sagot nya.

“Then where is he? Hindi nya dapat iniiwan ang girlfriend nyang mag-isa. Lalo na pag ikaw, baka may makaagaw pa sa’yo nyan eh.”

“Hindi pa sya dumarating.”

“Bakit? San sya pumunta?” He asked her, confused.

“Ewan ko. Hindi pa sya dumarating sa buhay ko eh.” Hindi nya alam kung ba’t nya nasabi yun. And to a stranger pa. She smiled at herself and went off the line. “Anyway, nice meeting you. Sana di na tayo magkita.” She put the book on a shelf and went out of the store.

“Hey!” Narinig nyang tawag nito sa kanya. “What’s your name?”

She just waved him goodbye and left.

“Ano ba naman kaseng naiisipan nyo at sinet-up nyo ko ng blind date?!” galit na tanong nya sa mga kaibigan.

“Camz, it’s just a date. Hindi ka pa mamamatay.” Pagpapaliwanag ni Mishe, ang kaibigan nyang mahilig makialam sa buhay nya.

“Yeah Camz. At saka, don’t you think it’s time to get yourself a boyfriend? 26 ka na ah.” Pagsang-ayon ni Kia.

She glared at them. “Ano bang masama dun? Eh sa ayaw ko eh.”

“Asus! Gusto mong tumandang dalaga?!” tanong ni Agui.

“Eh pano kung gusto ko?” Paghahamon nya.

“Oh c’mon Camz. It’s just a date!” Pag-uulit ni Mishe, as if she didn’t hear the first one! Damn! Palibhasa sila kung nakakailan na. Hindi ba nila alam na mahirap sumabak sa relationship ang isang NBSB? Magugulo lang ang buhay nya.

“Camz, maganda naman yung restaurant na pupuntahan nyo eh. And they serve the best chocolate desserts in town, Di ba, mahilig ka sa chocolate?”Pangungumbinsi ni Agui.

Tumango lag sina Kia at Mishe. “And don’t embarrass my cousin. Date lang naman eh. Hindi ka pa magpapasakal. Subukan mo lang. Libre pa yung food. Mahal pa naman dun.” Pakikiusap ni Mishe.

She sighed. “Fine! But just this once.”

“They all hugged her enthusiastically.

Mike seemed at ease with her. At napakadaldal din. Wala syang magawa kundi kumain. Buti na lang masarap yung soufflé.

“....so, how about you?” Bigla tanong nito sa kanya.

“Hmm?” Kanina pa pala sya nakatulala. All she’s hearing are blah, blah and blah. “Pardon?”

Mike just smiled. “I asked you ano’ng hobbies mo.”

“I like reading.” Maikli nyang sagot. Her hobbies kept her indoors. Hindi sya mahilig sa sports. Buti na lang hindi sya tumataba. She turned to her soufflé and realized that it’s gone.”Can I order another one?” Tanong nya kay Mike. He looked at her uncomfortably. Paano’y nakakatatlo na sya. Pang-apat na nga.

“Ahm...okay. Waiter!”

Nagtaka si Justine ng bumalik ang waiter dala ang order ng table four. Nakakatatlo ng soufflé ang mga ito. Alam nyang masarap ang soufflé nya but no one had ordered this much before. Sinilip nya ang table na halos katapat ng kitchen. A couple. Nakita nyang nakangiwi yung lalaking nakaharap sa kanya. Habang yung babae ay itinataktak ang mga mugmog ng cup na nilagyan ng soufflé. She has her back on him. Ang takaw, he thought to himself. Kung ganyan ang date ko, hindi ko ipagbabayad.Pero mayamaya ay napangiti sya. After all, karamihan sa mga babae ay takot kumain ng desserts, let alone three. He admired this woman’s cheekiness. Ang malas lang nung lalaking kasama, siguradong butas na butas na ang bulsa nito.

Cam clapped her hands when the soufflé came out. Hindi naman talaga sya ganito katakaw. Inasar lang nya yung date nya, para di na umulit. Bigla nyang pinigil ang waiter sa pag-alis.

“Yes ma’am? Anything else?”

“Please send my compliments to the chef. His soufflé is the best I’ve ever tasted.” Nakangiti nyang sabi rito.

“Yes ma’am. Makakarating po.” The waiter said before walking away.

Hindi na nagtaka si Justine ng matanggap ang compliment ng costumer. Being the youngest pastry chef and co-owner of the restaurant, maraming tumuturing sa kanya bilang isang culinary genius. Halos araw-araw ding may nagcocompliment sa kanya. But there’s something about this woman that intrigued him. He decided that he’d like to meet her. He took off his toque and headed out of the kitchen.

“Hi.” He greeted the people at table four. He looked down at the woman, chancing to meet her gaze. He got a bit surprised when he recognized her. “Hey you.” He smiled widely.

Halos mailuwa ni Cam ang kinakain na soufflé. “I-I need to go to the bathroom.

Excuse me.” Dali-dali syang tumayo. Now he’ll think I’m a pig! Matagal-tagal din syang nakasandal sa pintuan ng isang cubicle. After what seemed like forever, she went out, hoping she’d find Mike alone. Hindi naman sya nabigo.

“What happened to you?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

She wrinkled her nose. “Sumakit ang tiyan ko eh. Sorry.”

Mike looked at his watch. “Ahm..I got to go Cam. May importante pa kase akong lakad eh.Can I take you home now?”

She shook her head. “No. You go ahead. Sayang naman yung pagkain eh. Uubusin ko lang.”

He stood up and left without another word. She thinks he’s just as glad to get rid of her as she is with him. Oh well, she’s not aiming to please. Kung ayaw ni Mike sa kanya, she couldn’t care less. After having her last spoon of soufflé, she stood up to leave. Pero biglang may pumigil sa kanyang, a big hand pushed her down back to her seat. She looked up to see him, Justine. She guessed she wasn’t a bit surprised. Umupo din ito sa tapat nya.

“So, I see you liked my soufflé.” Nakangiti nitong sabi.

“Yeah, I’m glad I didn’t throw up.”

Napahalakhak ito. “Ganyan ka ba talaga?”

“Anong ganto?” depensa nya.

“Ganyan! Sarcastic. Snob...Matakaw.”

Pinandilatan nya ito. Causing him to go hysteric. Napatawa din sya. Sabay tigil naman nito, looking at her like he’s seeing her for the first time. “What?” she asked.

“Wala lang. Ang cute pala ng tawa mo.”

“Bolero ka rin ano.” Puna niya.

“I don’t kid with stuff like that Cambria.”

Great! She could kill Mike for that. “I didn’t tell you my name.”

“You didn’t have to.” Sagot nito sa kanya. “Your date practically begged me to take you away from him. Ang takaw mo daw kase.” Natatawa nitong sabi.

“So what kung matakaw ako? Ang sarap kayang kumain.” Lalo na pag ikaw ang nagluto. Gusto nyang idagdag.”So, you’re the chef.”

“Yeah, I guess I am.”

“So, pwede na pala ako ritong kumain ng libre.” She teased.

He shook his head. “Chef lang ako. I don’t own the place.” This was partially a lie, by the way.

She just shrugged.

“Can I get your number?” Justine asked her.

“Yeah sure. Alin ba dun? TIN? ATM? Bank account? O favorite number?”

This caused him to laugh again. But then he got really serious. “Your phone number, syempre.”

“Be specific kase.” Palusot nya. This can’t be happening. It can’t really be real. A guy like him is way out of her sphere, although she had to admit, he was exactly her type. A sudden flash brought her thoughts back to reality. He took her picture!

“Hey! No pictures!” Saway nya dito.

“Magrereklamo ka pa eh nakuha ko na. Number mo?”

“No way!” Tutol niya.

“Free of charge ka dito one month. Just give me your number and you can eat all the soufflé you want.”

She’s tempted..sooo tempted. She bit her lower lip, thinking. “Akala ko ba chef ka lang?”

“Well..” Hell, he’s almost caught. “I can pay for it. I guess..”

“Fine.” She took the phone from his hand and typed the numbers.”O ayan. Just don’t oblige me to text back.” Tumayo na sya at umalis bago pa man ito makapag-reklamo. She decided to go to a Smart center. Bibili na sya ng bagong sim card.

“Ay mam..sori po. Ubos na eh.” Luck! Well, she thought, madami pa naming tindahan dyan. But after going through three stores and ending up with nothing, she decided to give up. How come na wala syang mabili? Kung hindi walang tao, walang tinda. Hay, maybe she’ll leave it this way, for a while.

Maya maya ay nakareceive na sya ng text muli kay Justine. Alam nya agad na ito yon, sa text pa lang.

Take good care of yourself, Miss Mighty Souffle-eater. J

“Hmp! Adik!”

She erased his number immediately.

Magreply ka naman oh..pleaaaaasssssseeeeeeeeee....

Text nito kinagabihan. She sighed. Makulit ang isang to ah...But she didn’t reply. Magsasawa din ang isang yon..or so she thought.

“What are you doing here?!” Tanong nya ng makita nya itong nakasandal sa tabi ng pintuan ng Comic Alley.

“Bakit? Bawal ba ‘ko dito?” Nakangiti nitong tanong sa kanya.

“Are you following me?”

Tumawa ito. “Don’t you believe in coincidence?”

“Not with you. No.”

Justine expected the reaction. Ang totoo nyan, pinatract nya ang cell number ni Cambria, kaya kahit san ito magpunta ay madali nya itong nasusundan. He had never done this before. Pero naiintriga talaga sya sa babaeng ito.

“Nandito na rin lang tayo, why don’t you hang out with me?” aya nya dito.

“Wala ka bang girlfriend na makukulit?”

“Wala eh. Hayaan mo, pag naging tayo, meron na ‘kong makukulit.” Biro nya.

“Ha-ha. Joke ba yan? Tatawa na ba ‘ko?”

Hell, she’s tough. His charming smile has finally found its match. Sabi sa kanya ng mga magulang nya dati, makukuha daw nya lahat ng bagay na magustuhan nya with that smile. Well, he did, before he found himself wanting her. It seemed like she’s the only exception to that.

“Laugh all you can. Baka di ka na makatawa pag na-in-love ka sa’kin ah.”

“Ang kapal rin ng mukha mo no?” Mataray nitong sagot sa kanya. Well, makapal naman talaga ang mukha nya, so he couldn’t argue with that.

Gustong mailing ni Cambria. Coincidence, my ass! She sucks at flirting but he doesn’t seem to mind. Pero alangan namang pagbintangan nya itong sumusunod sa kanya. Ang kapal naman ng mukha nya. Tapos dagdag problema ang ugali nito. He’s acting like he really likes her. And she doesn’t know how to respond to that.

“Bakit nga pala hindi ka nagrereply?” tanong nito sa kanya. Accusation was clearly on his voice.

“Wala akong load eh.” Dahilan nya.

“Sana nag-Smart alert ka ng napaloadan kita.”

“Eh di nagka-utang pa ko sa’yo.”

“Bakit? Sisingilin ba kita?”

“Malay ko sa’yo.” She stuck her tongue at him. Para syang bata. But it’s better this way. She can’t be involved with him.

She’s so cute. Every time Justine sees her, he can’t help but wonder kung bakit wala itong boyfriend. Did someone break her heart long ago?

“Bakit wala ka pang boyfriend?” he blurted out.

“Di ba natanong mo na sa kin yan dati?”

“Did I?”

Cam rolled her eyes. “Ano ka, ulyanin?”

Tumawa lang si Justine. Ang saya naman ng taong to, she thought. “Lahat na lang ba ng bagay tinatawanan mo?”

“Eh ikaw, lahat ba ng lalaki tinatarayan mo o ako lang?”

“Yun lang mga annoying na tulad mo.”

“Am I really annoying?”

“Talaga? Di mo pansin? “ she ventured off the store. Sinundan sya nito. Muntik na syang mapasigaw ng hilahin sya nito sa Jollibee . “Let’s eat first.” Sabi nito.

“Ayoko! Busog pa ‘ko.” But he didn’t heed. Dire-diretso lang sila hanggang sa pinaupo sya nito at pumunta ito sa counter. Iiwanan nya sana ito ng mapansin nyang bitbit na nito ang bag nya. She didn’t even realize na wala na ito sa kamay nya. She sighed and slumped back to the chair. Nakamungot pa din sya pagdating nito.

“O, super meal na inorder ko for you. Alam ko namang kukulangin sa’yo yung regular eh.”

“Hindi ako matakaw no.Masarap lang kumain.”Pagdedepensa nya.

“Fine by me.” He said. “Mas gusto ko sa babae yung ganyan. Walang arte pagdating sa pagkain.”

He then sat down and started eating. Habang ang babae namang kaharap nya ay pasyahan sa pagtatanggal ng kernels sa pinggan nito.

“Ayaw mo ng mais?”

Cam wrinkled her nose. “Ampanget ng lasa nyan eh.”

“Akala ko ba pag matakaw, walang pinipiling pagkain?”

Tiningnan sya nito ng masama. He got the idea and chuckled. “Joke lang.”

“Ilang taon ka na nga pala?” Tanong nito sa kanya. She answered. “26.”

“Talaga? I’m 28 naman.” Sabi nito.

Tinaasan nya ito ng kilay. “Tinanong ko ba?”

“Hindi. Masama bang sabihin?”

“Hindi. I just don’t care.” Pambabara nya.

“Bakit wala kang boyfriend?” Pag-uulit nito.

“Paulit-ulit? Unli? Unli?” Napatawa na naman ito.

“Ang sungit mo talaga no? Meron ka siguro.”

Pinandilatan nya ito. “Di ba sabi ko sa’yo dati ‘wag ka nang magpapakita sa’ kin? Bakit nakita na naman kita? Nananadya ka ata eh..” Pamimintang nya.

“Kasalanan ko bang pinupuntahan mo din yung mga pinupuntahan ko? O baka naman ikaw itong sumusunod sa’kin. Crush mo ‘ko no?” Nangingiti nitong sabi.

Umiling na lang si Cambria. “You’re impossible!”

Justine went to Mishe’s house after taking Cambria home. She greeted him with a huge smile.

“So, how did it go cuz?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

“I think she’s softening up.” Sabi nya dito. Kanina ng nakasakay sila sa kotse nya ay napatawa nya si Cambria. It’s a good start.

“Pagtyagaan mo na yung kaibigan kong yun. Wala pa kaseng nagiging boyfriend yun eh.”

“Bakit nga ba?” tanong nya dito.

“Eh kase ang sungit. Nakaka-intimidate. Kahit nga kami natatakot dun eh. Walang lalaking makalapit. Ikaw pa lang.” Pag-aassure nito sa kanya.

He smiled. “Kilala na ba nya ‘ko?”

Umiling ito. “Hindi pa eh. Baka magalit yun eh. Kaibiganin mo muna.”

He shrugged. “I was hoping that it could be more than that.” At that comment, his cousin smiled then frowned.

“Straighten up things first with Francesca. Ayokong masaktan yung bestfriend ko.”

He nodded.

“Anong DATE?! DATE NA NAMAN?! DI BA SABI KO AYOKO NA?!” Nanggagalaiti si Cambria. Isi-net-up na naman kase ni Mishe sa kung sinong Poncio Pilato.

“Calm down Camz! Hindi ka naman ipapakain sa mga leon ah. Ang OA mo.”

“Ayoko na! I just agreed with you the first time because Mike is your cousin. But once is enough!”

To her surprise, tumawa si Mishe.

“AT ANO’NG NAKAKATAWA?!”

“Mike’s not my cousin. He’s just Mike.”

Lalong nagalit si Cambria sa narinig. “So you’re saying that you set me up with a total stranger? How dare you?!”

“Geez. Chill out Camz.” Pagkakalma sa kanya ni Kia.

“CALM DOWN?! How can I calm down? “

Mishe let out a sigh. “It’s just for experience Camz. Makipag –date ka muna. Blind dates are totally safe. Tsaka mga kakilala naman namin yung mga sini-set-up namin sa’yo eh.”

“When will you ever stop?!” she exasperated a sigh.

They all smiled. “Pag nagka-boyfriend ka na.”

Naabutan ni Justine si Camz na nakapangalumbaba sa table ng restaurant nya. Nilapitan nya ito agad.

“What’s wrong?”

Tiningnan sya nito. “Why do you care?”

He shrugged. “Gusto mo ng souffle?” Tanong nya dito.

“Libre ba?”

“Tell me your problem first.”

She sighed. “Eh kase naman, si-net-up na naman ako ni Mishe. May calendar pa nga

sya..araw-araw may pangalan ng iba’t ibang lalaki. Ayaw nya ‘kong tigilan.”

Humalakhak si Justine. “Eh kung sinasagot mo na ba ‘ko eh...di wala ka na sanang problema.”

Tinitigan nya ito. He really isn’t that bad. Maybe... “Would you pretend to be my boyfriend?” She regretted it the instant it came out of her mouth. “Forget I said that.”

Pagkakataon na, he thought.”Sure, I’ll do it.”

“I said forget it.”

“No. I’ll do it. Sakit na rin kase sa ulo ang pagiging matchmaker ni Mama eh. Trust me; it’ll do us both a favor.”

“Wala ka pa bang girlfriend?” Takang tanong nito sa kanya.

“Eh ikaw, wala kang boyfriend?” Tanong nya din dito. Umirap si Cambria. “Kung meron ba, tingin mo mamomroblema ako ng ganito ngayon?”

“There’s your answer.” He said simply.

“Fine.” Cambria said.

“What fine?”

“Sige payag na ‘ko. Just remember that it’s all pretend.”

Justine nodded. “Fine by me. Ikaw itong inaalala ko, baka matuluyan ka sa ‘kin.” At saka ito tumawa. She ignored his comment. “Where’s my souffle?”

He stood up.”Wait here.”

“So, kaya pala ayaw mong makipag-date ah. You didn’t tell us you already have a boyfriend.” Nakangiting sabi ni Mishe. Wala man lang tampo sa boses nito. Hindi

naman sya nagtaka. This is the moment they’ve all been waiting for.

“Hindi nyo naman kase ako tinanong.” Palusot nya.”This is Justine, by the way. Justine, these are my three annoying friends: Mishe, Kia and Agui.”

“HI!!” Sabay-sabay nilang bati kay Justine. He just smiled and winked at them, sharing a secret very much unknown to Cambria.

“Pakitanggal na nga ng kamay mo, wala na sila.” Saway nya dito, na kanina pa nakaakbay sa kanya.

“Baka may spy sa paligid.”

Binatukan nya ito. “Sira! Nanananching ka lang eh! ”

“Asus. Kunware pa. Kinikilig naman.” Eh totoo namang kinikilig sya pero bakit nya aaminin? Their relationship is just a game. If she falls, she fails. And she wouldn’t let that happen. Ganun naman sya lagi pag may gusto eh, laging patago. Kaya siguro nalilipasan sya ng panahon.

“Uy,natahimik. In love ka na sa ‘kin no?” Pangungulit nito sa kanya. Kurutin nga nya sa tagiliran. Napapitlag si Justine.

“Kapal!” sabi pa nya rito.

“From Justine ba yan?” Tanong ni Agui ng makita ang bulaklak na hawak nya. She smiled and nodded. Napangiti rin si Agui. “Uyy...si best friend, in love na....” Panunudyo nito sa kanya.

Ang dali nyo namang mauto, she thought. In love? Yeah, right. But on the back of her mind, she heard a tinee, tiny voice say: “Bakit? Hindi nga ba?”

“Kumusta naman ang masungit kong girlfriend? Did you miss me?” Nakangiting bati ni

Justine sa kanya. She made a face. “You wish. Ano na naman ba’ng ginagawa mo rito? Naubusan na ba ng costumer sa restaurant?”

“Hindi no. I took a day off. For you.” He handed her a bunch of flowers.

“At bakit naman?” Mataray nyang tanong.

“Syempre para maka-date ka. And..” He stopped her from opening her mouth to say something. “And don’t you dare refuse me today. Baka malasin ka.”

She frowned. “At bakit naman ako mamalasin aber?”

“Sabi kase ng matatanda, masamang tinatanggihan ang may birthday.” He said with a smile.

Pinamay-awangan nya ito. “Gawa-gawa mo lang yan eh.”

“Maybe. It’s still my birthday.”

“Happy birthday.” Walang kalatoy-latoy nyang bati.

“Walang kiss?” He asked. She rolled her eyes.

“Fine. Sa pisngi lang ah.” Pero ngumuso ito. Natawa sya. Mukha itong ewan. Hinampas nya ang noo nito. “Hoy, pampam ka.”

Sumimangot ito. “Ang damot mo naman.”

“Heh! Makikipag-date na ‘ko sa ‘yo. Just don’t ask for a kiss. Nakareserve na ‘yun eh.”

“Kanino naman?” He asked grimly.

“My one true love.” And with that, she left him to change.

He brought her to his favorite place by the lakeshore. Ang daming stars kaya tuwang-tuwa si Camz. It’s been so long since she saw some.

“Buti pa yung mga stars, nginingitian mo.” Sabi nya, na may halong tampo. Tumingin ito sa kanya. Her eyes questioning but she didn’t say anything. He sighed. Ngumiti ito sa kanya. “O ayan, nakangiti na.” Sabi nito.

“Kung di ko pa birthday, di ka pa ngingiti. Sana araw-araw, birthday ko.” He looked up and chanced to find a shooting star fell. He accidentally made a wish. Magkatotoo kaya?

Napatitig si Cambria sa katabi. He looked like a child, staring up at the sky. Paano nga kaya kung itong taong ‘to pala ang nakatadhana sa kanya? And she keeps on denying him kase hindi sya sigurado. What if they ended this game, magsisi kaya sya? He must’ve sensed her looking at him, because he then turned to face her and gave her a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Do you like what you see?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

She smiled at him. “Yes.”

Ngumiti rin ito sa kanya. “Ano’ng nasa isip mo ngayon?”

“If I should kiss you or not.” She said in all honesty. She looked away from his intense gaze.

“You really shouldn’t have said that.” He said, grabbing her by her waist as he scoot closer to her, his face inches away. Biglang lumakas ang kaba ni Cambria. Her mind scrambling for logic and common sense, pero hindi sya gumalaw. Dear fate, I’m letting you in on this one. Just this once.

His kiss melted down the walls she’d built around her. Her knees are turning into jell. Is this what is it supposed to feel like? Para syang kinukuryente, from her head to toe. No wonder, maraming naadik sa halik. She put her arms around his neck as he deepened his kiss. Dear God, I’m in love.

She opened her eyes to see him smiling down at her. “Can I see your eyes?” She asked. Hinawi ni Justine ang bangs nito at inilapit ang mukha sa kanya. She saw her own reflection in them. “Ang ganda pala ng mata mo no?” Sabi nya dito.

“In love ka na sa ‘kin no?” Nakangiting tanong nito sa kanya.

Yes.”No.” She denied.”Uwi na tayo, naka-kiss ka na eh.”

It’s been four days since that night. Nagtataka si Cambria, he didn’t call. He

doesn’t send her messages. He stopped sending flowers. He just vanished. Siguro, naramdaman nitong may feelings na sya para dito and he can’t reciprocate, that’s why he left. Talo sya. Oh well, it’s time to move on. Alam ko namang saglit lang yun eh.

“Camz?” She recognized Kia. Ilang araw na din itong nag-aalala sa kanya. “Please tell me you’re alright.”

She smiled. “I am alright.”

“Labas naman tayo Camz.” Yaya nito sa kanya. Umiling sya. “Ikaw na lang.”

Six months na rin pala. Still, those eyes hunt her. Sana hindi na lang nya yun tiningnan. She sighed. Her life got way more boring when he left. Namimiss nya ang pangungulit nito. Wala naman syang mapagbalingan. Her friends stopped setting her up. Hindi rin sila pumapayag na gumala sya ng hindi sila kasama. It seemed odd. Dapat nga sila pa ang nanghihikayat sa kanya. She finally decided to call Mishe up.

“Hey Mishe! Wanna go clubbing?” Na-shock ang nasa kabilang linya.

“Ano’ng nakain mo?” Takang tanong nito sa kanya.

“Ahm...lunch? Seriously though, labas naman tayo. I’m sooo bored.”

“Camz—“

“Look Mishe—since naman matagal nyo na ‘kong hinihikayat na magboyfriend—now I’m finally ready.”

Silence.

“Mishe?”

“May boyfriend ka na ah.”

“Wala no.” Tutol nya.

“Camz—“

“Fine. Kung ayaw mong sumama, ako na lang. Bye.”

“Cam.” He’s wearing a simple smile. Not the big grin she got used to. “Hi.” Nagulat si Camz. After what seemed like forever, nandito na naman sya, nagbabalik.

She composed herself. And gave him her practiced smile. “Hi! Dumating ka na pala!”

She noticed his unease. “Ahm..yeah. I just got back. Kamusta ka na?”

“I’m good.” She said in a rather high voice. “Never better, actually. Ikaw, kumusta?”

“Eto..” he shrugged. “Gusto mong kumain?”

No . Of course not. “Sure.”

“Thank you nga pala ah.” Sabi nito sa kanya. Nagtaka si Justine.

“For what?” Tanong nya.

“For doing me a huge favor six months ago. Tinigilan na ko ni Mishe.” Sabi nito sa kanya. His heart sank. That’s really all it is to her. A favor.

“You’re welcome.”

“San ka nga pala nanggaling? Bigla ka na lang nawala eh.”

He looked away. “France. May inayos lang ako.”

“Ah.” She didn’t pry.

Same hair. Same eyes. He’s almost the same. Yung expression lang nya, tingin ni Camz ay para itong namatayan. He looked so gloomy. Bihira na rin itong ngumiti. Parang anlaki-laki ng problema. Gustuhin man nya itong i-comfort, she restraint herself. Tama na yung pagkakamali nya minsan.

She felt the tension brewing. Kanina pa sila walang imikan. Nasan na yung Justine na madaldal?

“Bakit ka nga pala bumalik? Didn’t things go well in France?” She finally asked, breaking off the silence.

“Akala ko lang kase may babalikan pa ‘ko.” Mahina nitong sagot.

“Did you get fired?!”

Lumarawan sa mukha ni Justine ang pagtataka. “Huh?”

“Sabi mo kase—“

He smiled, halatang pilit. “No. I didn’t.”

“Date? What date?” Takang tanong ni Camz kay Mishe.

“Your date..with my cousin. Di ba hindi natuloy dati?”

She stared at Mishe, her hands akimbo. “Baka kung sino na naman yan ah.”

Mishe smiled. “Trust me Camz. Galing pang abroad ‘tong pinsan ko. He’s cute. I’m sure you’ll like him!”

As if it’s still possible for her to like someone else.

“Fine. San ba?”

Mishe widened her smile. “Sa tagaytay. One week kayo doon.”

“Anlayo naman! Iiwanan mo ‘ko sa isang lalaking di ko kilala?”

“Camz, he’s not a stranger. He’s my cousin. At saka kung may mangyayari naman sa inyo, papakasalan ka nun agad. I won’t complain. Gusto rin naman kitang maging cousin-in-law eh.”

Pinandilatan nya si Mishe. But she agreed. Ewan nya kung bakit. Siguro, gusto nyang gumanti sa taong nang-iwan sa kanya. Maybe, she still hope na may feelings din ito sa kanya.

Pagakarating nila ni Mishe sa Tagaytay ay binilinan sya nito. “Be nice to my cousin Camz. He’s been very miserable lately.” Yun lang at umalis na ito.

“As if I have a choice.” She muttered. But she had, however, had a choice. She chose to go here and be with someone she don’t even know. Kahit sabihin pa mang pinilt sya, still—pumayag sya.

She was greeted at the gate by an old lady. She guessed she’s the caretaker of the house. She looked around and liked what she saw. Maganda ang view. The house is overlooking the lake. Mataas ang kinalalagyan nito kaya kita lahat ng kagandahan ng Taal. Ever since she can remember, she’s always wanted to go to Tagaytay. And now, it came true.

Sinundan nya ang matanda at ang isang boy na nagdala ng gamit nya. Outside it was beautiful, but inside it was breathtaking. Fully furnished ang bahay. May fireplace pa nga na sobrang ikinatuwa nya. The floor was made of Narra. The ceiling is high. The windows are all glass, out looking the picturesque view outside.

“Hinihintay po kayo ni Sir sa veranda. Mananghalian daw po muna kayo.”

Tumango lang sya dito at pumunta sa veranda. She stopped at her tracks when she saw the guy who is busily admiring the scene before him. He’s tall, almost so tall he seemed unreachable. He has curly hair that is as soft as a child’s. And when he turned around, she saw the most beautiful eyes that has no sparkle in them.

“You’re Mische’s cousin?”

Justine winced. Accusation was clearly on her voice.

“Whatever game you’re playing Justine, I’m not about to play along. I’m going home.” Cambria turned around to leave. He ran after her. “Cam, wait. Let me explain.”

Nilingon sya nito. ”Bakit ba kase ako pa ang napagtripan mo ha? Andami-dami dyang game makipaglokohan, ako pa ang napili mong idamay!”

“Cam—“

“Don’t get me wrong Justine. I’m not affected or anything..it’s just that..well...sana man lang sinabi nyo sa ‘kin. Nagmumukha na pala akong tanga ng di ko alam.”

“I’m sorry. Alam ko kaseng galit ka sa ‘kin eh. I never should’ve left you like that. Ni hindi man lang ako nagpaalam—“

“I’m fine with that. It’s not like you’re my boyfriend or anything anyway.”

Justine flinched. “Sorry.” Pag-uulit nya.

He was a bit surprised when she smiled. “Don’t worry about it.”

He pushed his luck further. “Will you stay?”

“Sure. Gusto ko rin namang malibot ang Tagaytay eh.”

At last, he smiled—a true and genuine smile. “I made souffles.”

The lunch went well..and silent. Cam pretented to admire the view while eating. He didn’t seem to mind. Pero aaminin nyang maganda na ang mood nito. Mukha ng masaya. Cam wanted to relax but she didn’t let her guard down, especially when she’s with him.

“Gusto mo bang mamasyal mamaya?” Aya nito sa kanya.

“Sige.”

“Great! Pupunta tayong hacienda mamaya. I’ll teach you to ride a horse. Madali lang. Siguradong mag-eenjoy ka.” Sabi pa nito na nakangiti. Biglang dumaldal.

“Takot ako sa kabayo.” Reklamo nya.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take care of you.”

Eh takot din ako dun, she thought.

Surprisingly, it’s not as scary as she thought. With Justine beside her, whispering sweet nothings in her ears, mukhang nag-eenjoy pa nga sya. Pero bigla syang nagulat ng inamoy nito ang buhok nya. Bigla syang na-conscious.

“S-stop that!” Saway nya dito.

He chuckled. “Amoy araw. Hindi ka pa naliligo ano?”

“Eh syempre nilalamig ako. Maliligo sana ako pagkarating ko kaso hinila mo naman ako rito.”

“Oi oi..hindi kita hinila ah. You came by yourself.”

Inirapan nya ito.” Hmp! Syempre..pinilit mo ‘ko weh.”

“At nagpapilit ka naman.” He smirked. She couldn’t help it. She smiled.

Gabing gabi na ay gising pa rin si Cambria. Nasa veranda sya at nakatingala. Suddenly, she felt a set of arms embrace her. She jerked away. “Hey!”

“Baka nilalamig ka na.” Pagdadahilan ni Justine.

“I’m fine!” she said, blushing.

“Uyyy..nagba-blush...” Panunukso nito sa kanya.

“Hindi ako nagba-blush! Nilalamig lang ang pisngi ko kaya namumula.” Pagdadahilan nya.

“Then let we warm them up for you!” Sabi nito at bigla na lang syang pinaghahalikan sa pisngi. So fast that her face suddenly heated up. After seeing the result, Justine smiled. “See? Eh di hindi na malamig. Pero namumula pa rin.”

She grimaced.“Hindi nga malamig, puro laway naman.” Napahalakhak si Justine, a sound that makes her heart swell.

“Nilalamig ka pa din ba? I could—“

“Hep!” she raised her hands to stop him.”Nakalusot ka lang sa mukha ko pero—“

Tumawa na naman ito. ”Malisyosa ka rin pala! I was just about to tell you na ikukuha kita ng jacket, yang utak mo naman..”

“Heh! Makapasok na nga!” Kunwa’y inis nyang sabi.

Pero hindi pa man sya nakakahakbang ng pigilan sya nito. “Wait.”

Nilingon nya ito. “O?”

He kissed her forehead. “Goodnight.”

Ilang minuto ng nakaalis si Justine pero hindi pa rin makagalaw si Cambria. “Damn..” she muttered. Napapitlag sya ng biglang may tumapik sa kanya. “Nandyan ka pa rin?” It was Justine.

“Akala ko ba papasok ka na?”

“Ah..kase...I changed my mind. D-dito muna ako.” She stammered.

“Sige, sasamahan muna kita.” Pagpiprisinta nito.

“Hindi na.”

“I insist.” Hinawakan nito ang kamay nya at hinila sya sa upuan. Nang makaupo na sila ay niyakap sya nito. She didn’t complain. Ang totoo nyan, kanina pa sya nilalamig.

“Cam?”

“Hmm?”

“Bakit wala ka pang boyfriend?”

Tiningnan nya ito. “Yan na naman? Wala ka na bang ibang maitanong?”

Ngumiti lang ito sa kanya.”Eh kelan mo balak magkaroon?”

“Pag may nanligaw.”

“Bakit? Wala pa ba?”

“Kung meron man, hindi makalusot kay Mishe.”

Lihim na napangiti si Justine. “Eh pag niligawan kita, sasagutin mo ba ‘ko?”

“Oo.”

“Talaga?!”

“Oo..o hindi lang naman,di ba?.”

Sumimangot si Justine. “Cam, be serious.”

“I am serious.” Then she made her funny-serious-face. Pareho silang natawa. “Ano nga palang ginawa mo sa France?”

“Inasikaso ko lang yung business ko dun. Umalis kase yung head chef, kaya ako muna ang pumalit pansamantala habang wala pa kaming nakikitang replacement.”

“Bakit ka nga pala umuwi dito, eh may business ka na pala dun?”

Ngumiti ito. “Syempre para magka-boyfriend ka na.”

Siniko sya ito. “Eeee..seryoso..”

Justine sighed. ”Kase may malaking problema ako dun eh. Tinakasan ko lang.”

Kumunot ang noo ni Cambria. “Ano’ng problema?”

Justine patted her cheek. ”Secret...Matulog na tayo, baka mapuyat ka.”

“Hey Cam, how’s the date?”

“Bakit hindi mo sinabing pinsan mo pala si Justine?”

“Hindi mo naman kase tinanong eh. “

Napasapo sa ulo si Cam. “Ay sus ginuod ka Mishe! Alam mo bang pagka-eepal nitong pinsan mo? Magpinsan nga kayo.” Napatawa ito sa sinabi nya.

“Pero aminin mo Camz..type mo sya no? Maganda talaga ang lahi namin. Sabi ko sa’yo eh.”

“Kapal..grabe. Hmm. Nga pala, ano’ng ginawa ng pinsan mo sa France?”

“Uyyy..bakit mo tinatanong?”

Napakamot sya ng ulo. Bakit nga ba? “Eh..kase...ano..curious lang ako. Ayaw kase nyang sabihin kung bakit eh.”

“Alam mo Camz, pag ready na si Justine, sasabihin nya din naman sa’yo yun eh. Give him some time.”

She shrugged. “Fine.”

Gutom na gutom na si Cambria kaya nagpunta sya ng kusina at naghanap ng makakain. Wala ang mga kasama sa bahay. Hindi rin naman nya mahagilap si Justine. Kinuha nya ang nakitang strawberry jam at tinapay sa shelf. Kumakain na sya ng mag-ring ang phone nya.

“Hello? Asan ka? Gutom na ‘ko.”

“Sorry..wala na kaseng flour at eggs eh, igagawa pa naman kita ng souffle—pinag-day-off ko naman yung mga katulong-- kaya ako na lang ang umalis. Kaso traffic naman.”Halos pasigaw nitong sabi ng magsipagbusina ang mga sasakyan.

“Pasalamat ka may nahagilap ako kahit tinapay.”

Tumawa ito. “Expired na ata yan eh. Haha..joke lang. Sige, babawi na lang ako sa’yo mamaya.”

“Sige sige. Ingat.” Aktong i-e-end nya ang call ng magsalita ito ulit. “Love you.” Then the phone went dead.

Hindi, I misheard that. Hindi naman siguro nya sasabihin yun. She jumped from her seat when she heard the car parked.

“Hi!”

Nilingon nya si Justine. “H-hi.”

“O, ba’t ang tahimik mo?” Puna nito ng hindi sya nagsasalita.

“Tahimik naman talaga ‘ko. Pinaiingay mo lang.” Lumakad sya palayo dito.

“Hey, what’s wrong? Gusto mo ipag-bake kita?”

She shook her head. “Just don’t say things you don’t mean.” She saw confusion in his face. “Ano na namang sinabi ko?”

“Wala.”

“Yung ‘Love you’ ba?”

Nagtakip ng tenga si Cambria. “Stop it!”

“I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you! I love

you! There! I said it.” Tinanggal nito ang kamay nya sa tenga nya. “Now you have to listen.”

Napatingin sya dito. He seemed so serious. Kinabahan tuloy sya. “Ang epal mo...” Was all she could say.

He grinned. “Kinikilig ka no!” She blushed, knowing that it’s true. “Hindi ah!”

“Liar. Ang haba na ng ilong mo oh.”

She hurriedly looked at her reflection on the glass window. Gusto nyang matawa sa sarili nya. Alam naman nyang hindi totoo yun eh. By the glass, she saw him looked at her and slowly walked towards her. She watched in fascination as he reached for her and kissed her neck, and then he whispered to to her ears. “Let’s just be honest with each other. Even just for today, shall we?”

“Fine. Then tell me what you did in France.” Hinarap nya ito.

“Fine.” Pag-uulit ni Justine. “I went there to break up with my girlfriend.”

“Y-you had a girlfriend? Di ba sabi mo—“

“Yes. I lied. And now I’m being honest.”

“Bakit?”

“Manhid ka ba?” Biglang sabi nito na ikinagulat nya. “Of course, I did it for you. Nainlove ako sa’yo eh.”

“At bakit ka naman maiinlove sa ‘kin aber?”

“At bakit naman hindi?”

Cam sighed. Bkit naman kase ganito. She was caught off guard. Wala na syang masabing matino. “Eh kase masungit ako, manhid, suplada, sarcastic at matakaw. Hindi ka ba nati-turn off?”

He grinned. “Yun nga mismo ang nagustuhan ko sa’yo eh. You’re very different. That’s why I’m so drawn into you.”

“Abnormal ka talaga.”

Tumawa ito. “Alam ko. Kaya nga nagustuhan mo ‘ko di ba?”

Umirap si Cambria. “At kelan ko sinabing gusto kita?”

“Ngayon lang.”

“Pilosopo ka talaga no?”

“Be honest Cam.”

“Is this the part where we make our speech? Yung parang sa end ng mga romance novels?”

He shrugged. “I guess..”

“Fine. Crush kita, aaminin ko. Oh ayan, nasabi ko na ah. Tigilan na natin to.”

Lalong lumapad ang ngiti ni Justine. “Kelan pa?”

“Since—well...since the first day at the bookstore.” Pag-amin nya na namumula ang mukha.

“See? Hindi naman mahirap sabihin, di ba?”

“Hindi daw...It’s so damn embarrassing!”

“Don’t worry, masasanay ka din.” Pag-aassure niya dito. “So, tayo na?”

“Ayaw mong umupo?”

Humagalpak ito ng tawa. “God, you’re priceless! Payakap nga!”

Cambria obliged. She let him hug her. Bahala na bukas.

“Let me just warn you. I’m not showy. I’m not affectionate. Inexperienced ako at

hindi marunong humalik. I get embarrassed showing my emotions. Palihim akong magalit. At hindi ko sasabihin kung bakit. Pag may problema ‘ko, manghuhula ka pa. Hindi ako magaling magluto. I’m a very jealous person at ayaw kong hindi ako ang inuuna. Sometimes, I get so demanding. At isa pa nga pala—“

He cut her off by kissing her. Napakapit si Cam dito sa pagkabigla. When he finally let go, they were both running out of breath. “Just shut up..” He said.

“Gusto ko lang sabihin sa ‘yo lahat para alam mo na. Ayokong mag-eexpect ka ng kung ano.”

“I’ll expect a lot from you.”

“Di ba kasasabi ko lang—“

“Relax. Joke lang! Masyado kang uptight.”

“Sasabihin ko nga sana sa ‘yo..uptight din ako.” Nginitian nya ito.

They just smiled at each other for some time. “Hindi ka ba nangangalay?” Tanong nya dito. Sya kase ngalay na. Kanina pa sila nakatayo. He didn’t answer. Hinatak na lang sya nito sa sofa at niyakap ulit sya. Then he kissed the top of her head.

“So, sinasagot mo na ba ‘ko?”

“Nagtanong ka na ba?”

“Bakit wala ka pang boyfriend?”

Nginitian nya ito. “Meron na.”

“Talaga? Sino?”

“Si Justine.”

“Gwapo ba?”

Pinisil nya ang pisngi nito. “Sobra.”

Justine widen his smile. “I love you.”

Cam kissed him on the lips. “I love you too.”

end

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KISMET: IT GETS COMPLICATED

Akala nyo ba happy ending na? Hindi pa..Walang relasyong puro saya at kulitan. Syempre, in reality, maraming pagsubok na pinagdadaanan ang dalawang taong involved sa isang relationship. Cambria surely agrees to that. Kung magulo na ang buhay nya noong single sya, mas gumulo na ngayon. Wala ng lalaking makalapit sa kanya—kahit kaibigan—without making Justine jealous. Halos oras-oras syang kinukumusta nito. Dapat lagi rin nitong alam kung san sya pumupunta at kung sino ang kasama nya. He keeps on reassuring her na ganito talaga ang mag-boyfriend but for her it’s all just crap. Hirap din pala ng ganun, it’s like a line’s been drawn to keep you in—walang freedom.

“Kelangan ba talagang kasama pa kita? Mag-go-grocery lang naman ako eh.” Reklamo nya kay Justine. He took a day off para lang masamahan syang mag-grocery. Ano sya, bata?

“Of course! Ayaw mo nun, may taga-bitbit ka ng dalahin mo.”

“Eh pano yung mga customer nyo? Baka maghanap ng desserts yung mga yun.”

“Marami pa namang staff sa restaurant. Hindi lang ako ang nagtatrabaho dun. At saka, andami mo namang reklamo. Feeling ko tuloy ayaw mo na ‘kong makasama.” Sabi nito na may halong pagtatampo.

She sighed. “Hindi ka pa ba nagsasawa ka pagmumukha ko? Araw-araw na tayong magkasama tapos kung hindi naman, magka-text o magkatawagan tayo.”

“Bakit? Ikaw ba, nagsasawa na sa ‘kin?”

Natigilan si Camz. Nagsasawa na nga ba sya? Hindi agad sya nakasagot. Justine got really angry at her. He turned around and left.

“Sis, may LQ ba kayo ni pinsan?” Tanong sa kanya ni Mishe ng tawagan nya ito. Ever since naging sila ni Justine, sis na ang tawag nito sa kanya. Dahilan nito, dun din naman daw ang punta nun. Hindi nya maintindihan kung saan yung ‘dun’ na sinasabi nito.

“Galit na galit ba?”

“Naku, umuusok ang ilong! Hindi nga ng-dinner yun eh, nagkulong agad sa kwarto. And take note, he slammed the door on the way in.”

Cambria bit her lip. First major LQ nila to. Grocery lang, nagalit na ito sa kanya? Ang babaw naman. “Ang babaw nya ah.” Sabi nya kay Mishe.

“Ano ba kaseng pinag-awayan nyo?”

“Grocery.” Asar nyang sagot.

“Grocery? Ang OA nyo ah.”

“Sya lang no. Sabi ko lang naman ‘wag nya na ‘kong samahan eh, nagalit na agad.”

Tumawa ng malakas si Mishe. “Syempre, mahal ka nun eh.”

“Mahal ba yung natitiis hindi kausapin.”

“Mag-sorry ka na kase ng magkaayos na kayo.”

She rolled her eyes. ”Bakit AKO magsosorry?”

“Tsk tsk tsk.” She could imagine Mishe shaking her head. “Yang lecheng pride na yan ang sisira sa inyo eh.”

Mishe is right. “Pero bakit ako ang unang magsosorry? Wala naman akong kasalanan.”

Pero ang konsensya nya na mismo ang nagrereklamo. Giving up, she dialled his number. “H-hello?”

Silence.

“Jus? Are you there?”

More silence.

“Mahal....” Napangiwi sya. Hanggang ngayon ‘di pa din sya sanay gumamit ng endearment. But desperate times calls for desperate measures. May tumikhim sa kabilang linya.

“Oh? Napatawag ka?” Si Justine. Hindi man nya ito nakikita eh alam na nyang nangingiti-ngiti na ito.

“Arte nito, gusto pa mahal ang tawag..” Naiinis nyang sabi.

“Magso-sorry ka ba o mang-aaway?”

“Sorry na po..”

“Sorry din.”

“Bati na tayo?”

“Hindi pa.”

Cam rolled her eyes. “Ano na naman?”

“I love you.” Malambing nitong sabi.

“I know, right?” Nang-aasar nyang sabi.

She heard him sigh. “Cam..”

“Next time na lang..Alam mo namang naiilang pa ‘kong magsabi nyan eh.”

“Sige..goodnight na lang.”

“Good night. Bati na tayo ah.” Paninigurado nya.

“Sige..” Matamlay nitong sabi. Alam nyang may tampo pa rin ito sa kanya. Bakit pa

kase kelangan na mag-a-i love you too na lang palagi? Hindi naman tanong yun eh, bakit kelangan may sagot? Di ba pwedeng ‘Thank you’ na lang?

Justine left the kitchen and headed for his office. Ang sakit ng ulo nya. Maya-maya ay nakaramdam sya ng kamay na nagmamasahe ng batok nya. He looked up to see Tracy, his assistant.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Pinalis nya ang kamay nito.

“Relax. I’ll make you feel better.” Sabi nito.

“Tracy..may girlfriend na ‘ko..Please leave me be...” Pakiusap nya dito. She didn’t seem to mind the fact though. “I know..” Sabi pa nito. “She’s cute—but—I bet she can’t do the things I can do to you.” And then she started kissing him.

Cambria clutched the cookies she baked for Justine. Almost too tight, she could crush them. She decided to pay him a surprise visit. She turned the knob and opened the door of his office. “Hi—“ She stopped dead on her tracks. The plan of surprising him suddenly backfired. She dropped the cookies and the sound startled the two.

“C-cam..” Justine called, surprised too. She saw him push the woman away.

The woman saw her and smirked. Then she walked away like nothing happened. Justine started to get up. ”Cam..it’s not what you think—“ She raised her hand to stop him.

“It’s...fine.” Wala sa loob nyang sabi.

Halatang hindi ito naniwala sa kanya. “Cam—“

“I said it’s fine!” But she sensed that her eyes would give her away. Dali-dali syang tumalikod at tumakbo paalis. Leaving the cookies on the floor--na pinagpuyatan nyang gawin buong gabi—as her monthsary gift.

“You saw what?” Hindi makapaniwalang tanong ni Mishe sa kanya.

“I saw them kissing.” She calmly replied. Biglang tumayo si Mishe at patakbong lumabas ng pintuan ng kwarto nya. Dali-dali nya itong sinundan. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“I’ll tear that bitches’ face! Ang landi talaga ng Tracy na yun! I’ll show her..”

“Wait!” hinila nya ito sa braso. “Calm down Mishe.”

“Calm down?!” Tiningnan sya nito ng masama. “How can I calm down?! Camz...nilalandi ng babaeng yun ang boyfriend mo!”

Napayuko sya. “Hayaan na lang natin.”

“My God! You’re unbelievable!” Sabi nito sa kanya at tuluyan ng umalis.

Justine ordered flowers. A dozen bunch actually. Ang sakit na ulo nya ay nadagdagan pa ng lagnat. And now thanks to Tracy—he could even lose his girlfriend. Damn that woman. Kung hindi lang ito anak ng co-owner ng restaurant, matagal na nya ‘tong sinesante. Tracy has a thing for him. At kahit may girlfriend na sya, mukhang wala pa rin itong balak na tigilan sya.

And now, he prays na sana magkaayos sila ni Cambria. He knocked at the door. After several knocks, she finally opened it.

“Cam..”

“O? Napadalaw ka?” Her eyes are cold.

“For you..” Iniabot nya ang isang pumpon ng roses at itinuro ang 11 pa na nasa likuran nya.

“I don’t eat flowers.”

He ignored her joke. “I’m sorry..Whatever happened earlier, it’s not what you think

—I swear!”

“It’s okay. Just forget it.”

“No. Cam..kung galit ka, just say it. ‘Wag ‘yung ganyan. You’re torturing me.”

“I’m not angry at you. Sana lang, ‘pag ayaw mo na sa ‘kin..sabihin mo lang. I’ll step aside.”

He looked at her like she just slapped him. “Cam—I’m not about to replace you.” He put the flowers down and held her hand. “Look, let’s just start anew. Monthsary natin di ba? Why don’t we go out tonight?”

“Okay. Pasok ka muna.”

“So, bati na kayo?” Tanong ni Mishe sa kanya kinabukasan. She just shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Anong ‘maybe’? Why aren’t you sure?”

Tiningnan nya ito. “Mishe...”

“Yes?”

“Nagkamali ata ako ng pinasok. Maybe it’s not my time yet.”

Kumunot ang noo ni Mishe. “Ahm..what exactly are we talking about?”

“Justine...and me. I guess—we need some space to think about our relationship.”

Mishe gaped at her. “You want to break up with him?”

“No! Not break up..ano lang..parang cool-off.”

“Aw. That’s worse than break-up, you know.”

“Mishe..help me. I need my freedom back.”

“Camz—don’t do this. It’ll surely break his heart.” Pakiusap nito sa kanya.

“Mishe..I need to do this. If we’re really meant to be..then we’ll be together again someday.”

“To hell with destiny! ‘Yan ang problema sa ‘yo eh. You always believe in that crap.”

“Mishe—“

Mishe raised her hands. “Fine. Do whatever you want.”

And his reaction is as she imagined it. “Why?!”

“It’s just for a while Jus. I just need some time to think it over.”

“Ano ba’ng kelangan mong pag-isipan?”

Cambria lowered her head. “Us.”

“Is it still about Tracy? Sinabi ko na, di ba? It was all just a big misunderstanding.”

She shook her head. “Then what?” Tanong ulit nito sa kanya.

“Hindi ko alam...I just needed some space.”

“ You want some space? Fine! I’ll give you space.” Pagkasabi nito’y saka sya nilayasan.She didn’t know at that moment kung ano ba ang mararamdaman nya: relief ba o regret?

One week na silang di nag-uusap. Laging out of reach ang phone nito. Wala rin ito sa restaurant. Hindi naman sya kinakausap ni Mishe. He is really giving her space—a lot of it.

Days became months and months turned into years. Akalain mo yun, antagal nitong nawala, halos hindi na nya maalala ang mukha nito. Hurting inside, she kept a straight face. Hindi naman talaga sya appropriate para sa mga ganung bagay eh. She always knew from the start that he wouldn't last with her. She's been mourning for three years now and it's time to move on. She got up from her bed and looked at herself in the mirror. Three years na din pala syang hindi nagpapagupit. Hassle na sa buhay nya ang buhok nya. "Hmm. I need a makeover." Nasabi nya sa sarili.

She got dressed and went to a nearby salon.

"Ay mama! Ang haba ng hair mo ah. And so soft. Ano'ng shampoo mo?" The gay hairdresser gushed.

She smiled. "Nasa pagsusuklay lang yan."

"Ano ba'ng gagawin natin? Rebond? Hot oil?"

"Cut it short."

The hairdresser dropped her hair and looked at her through the mirror like she just murdered someone and confesses. "What?" Natatawang tanong nya dito.

"Mama naman! Bihira lang sa babae ang may ganito kagandang buhok. Tapos ikaw na nabiyayaan, ipapagupit lang?"

"Would you forgive me if I tell you my reason?"

Sinipat sya ng tingin nito. "Hmm. I'll try."

Saka sya napilitang magkwento dito. Halos maluha-luha ang bakla sa kwento nya. Pati sya eh muntik na ring maiyak. "..so, you see, my hair just makes me remember all those things. I needed to cut it so that I could let go."

Kumuha ito ng tissue at nagpahid ng imaginary nitong mga luha. "Of course mama. I'll make you very pretty. Pamanicure ka na rin ha. Dagdag kita. Don't worry, may discount."

Tuluyan na syang natawa.

Ginabi na sya ng uwi. Pagdating sa bahay, having nothing to do, surfed her mobile internet. She saw something that interests her—mobile chatting. She decided to give it a try. She chose the ‘Kulitan’ category from the Uzzap menu and went to room 14. After a moment of thinking, she decided to use the nickname ‘Souffle.’ She got a bit overwhelmed with the fast exchange of messages from the chatters. After some exchange of greetings, wala ng pumansin sa kanya. Ganito ba talaga rito?, she asked herself.

Hi souffle. ASL?

“Finally..” A chatter named Hiro approached her on the room.

What’s an ASL? :) Sori. Kinda new here. She replied.

ASL stands for age, sex and location. So, watz urs?

“Ah..yun pala yun. Hmm..let’s see. 28, F and secret..haha..there.”

Secret?

:) ‘Bout u?

31, M, secret too. :DD

“Haha.nice...”

Mahaba-haba din ang napag-usapan ng dalawa. Kaso tinatamad ng mag-type yung narrator kaya let’s just skip that part :)

Maraming chatters na ang nakakapansin sa kakaibang friendship ng dalawa. It’s been a month pero hanggang ngayon ay hindi pa rin sila nagbibigayan ng pictures. Ang akala nga ng mga baguhan ay sila..pero hindi naman. Marami ring nagtatanong kung bakit hindi sila nagpapalitan ng number.

Let’s just leave it to fate. Was always her answer.

Fate seemed to be on her side. One fateful day, the leader of the clan decided to conduct an EB. She and Hiro agreed to meet up there and see where things will go.

On that day, she decided to go all out. She went for a tight-fitting dress which is sexy yet decent at the same time and paired it with boots that go up her ankles. Her bob-cut hair was adored with a studded hair clip. She also wore a pair of hoop

earrings which wasn’t really her thing. And to complete the outfit, she drove off her red Porsche.

And surely enough, sya ang pinakamaganda sa lahat ng girls na naandun. After the exchanges of pleasantries, she let her eyes wander for the possible Hiro around the room. She secretly hoped that he doesn’t look bad.

“Ate, si Kuya Hiro ba ang hinahanap mo?” Tanong sa kanya ni Bunek, her ‘little sister’ in the room.

She smiled. “Yeah. Have you seen him?”

Umiling ito. “Mali-late ata yun eh. Sabi nila galing daw abroad yun. Umuwi lang to meet you.” Kinikilig nitong sabi.

She felt butterflies invading her stomach. Ganun na ba sya kaimportante dito? Biglang nagtatalon si Jaymarie—Bunek’s real name—at may itinuro sa likod nya. Napalingon sya. She almost run for the hills when she saw him. It’s not that he’s bad-looking. In fact, gwapo ito. Hindi lang nya mapansin masyado dahil nakatuon ang mga mata nya sa kasama nitong lalaki. Feeling nya tuloy malaking joke lang ang lahat.

“ Souffle?” Nakangiting tanong nito sa kanya.

She just nodded her head, unable to tear her eyes away from the guy Hiro’s with. Nakakunot ang noo nito sa kanya na parang kinikilala sya. “I’m Hiro.” Hiro held out his hand. Wala sa loob nyang inabot ito. “By the way, here’s my friend—Justine. Justine, meet Ms. Souffle—Cambria Marie Allegre.”

“H-how--?”

“Your Justine’s ex, right?” Tumingin ito sa kanilang dalawa.

Mother Earth. Please open up and eat me.

“Not ex, James. I’m still her boyfriend.” Lalo syang nalito.

Hiro..or James..grinned at her upon seeing her confusion. “I’ll leave you both to talk.”

Cambria was very much uncomfortable. James was busy making friends with every girl on the place while she was left sitting at one corner with Justine. Ang mga ka-chat nya ay napapatingin na lang sa kanya with their questioning eyes. Pati sya ay

sasabog na ang utak sa kaiisip.

“Why did you cut your hair?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

Bigla syang napahawak sa buhok nya. She remembered those moments when he used to smell her hair. “A-ano kase...mainit.”

“And look at what you’re wearing! No wonder those guys are all over you.”

Napatingin sya sa damit nya. “H-hindi naman malaswa ah.”

Justine removed his jacket. “Here.“

Para syang batang sumunod dito. She took the jacket from his hand but he didn’t let go. “I missed you.” He said.

Parang nag-rigodon ang puso nya sa narinig. Get a hold of yourself Cam. You’re different now. “Well that’s a surprise.” Nasabi nya dito.

“How have you been Cam?”

Tiningnan nya ito ng matalim. “I’ve been coping. Kung sana hindi ka na nagpakita, nakalimutan na kita.”

“I have no intention of not going back. You know that. I just gave you space.”

Para syang binuhusan ng malamig na tubig sa narinig. Why is he being such a jerk?

“I need more.” She scooted away. Hinila sya ulit nito palapit.

“I gave you more than enough. I can’t stay away for another day.”

“Don’t think that you could take me back that easily. We were through since the day you went away.”

“No, we’re not. Hindi naman tayo nag-break eh.”

“Yes we did”

“Ows? Kelan? Would you like to refresh my memory? Kase from what I remember, you just asked for space and nothing more. You didn’t even mention the ‘Break-up’ word.”

“Well you’re too late na rin naman. I like Hiro now.” Pagsisinungaling niya.

“What, James? Hindi ‘yan papatol sa ‘yo. Or to any girl, for that matter. He’s already engaged. Ako kaya yung nakaka-chat mo matagal na.”

“Kahit na. Ayoko pa rin sa’yo.”

“Why?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

“Kase lagi kang umaalis.” Was her answer. Justine sighed. He never intended to leave her. Galit lang sya nung mga panahong yun. Kaso nagkaproblema naman ang business nya kaya hindi sya nakabalik agad. For the past three years, nakaharap nya ang pinakamatitinding economic crisis sa talambuhay nya. And to add to that, ginusto na rin nyang lumayo muna. Hindi na rin sya sure sa relationship nila ni Cam. Siguro nga, she’s just not ready yet.

“Bumabalik din naman ako ah.” Bawi nya.

“You’re always too late.” She lowered her head. He was so shocked ng makita nya ito kanina for the first time after 3 years. Gone was the shy and insecure Cambria. All he sees now is a feisty woman, clad in her gorgeous suit of armor. He liked her better this way. He always knew that she has the potential to be this eye-catching. He got a bit disappointed with her hair though. Masyado na itong maiksi. He wondered if it smells the same. And without even thinking, he buried his face in her hair, smelling her scent. Same fragrant sweetness.

“H-hey!” Saway nito sa kanya. She blushed. He smiled. At least some things stay the same.

Nag-init ang mukha ni Cambria sa ginawa nito. How dare him! “Don’t you ever do that again!” Smelling her hair in public! Nilinga nya ang mga kasama. Noboody seemed to notice. Busy ang lahat.

“Bawal ba’ng amuyin ng boyfriend ang buhok ng girlfriend nya?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

“I’m not your girlfriend!” Matigas nyang sabi.

Tiningnan sya nito. ”Of course you are.”

“Not anymore.” Mahina nyang sabi.

“Fine. If I have to court you all over again, I’ll do it. Pero wala ng lalaking makakalapit pa sa ‘yo.” He said—in such a formal tone—that sent her chills. Ewan ba nya, siguro dahil tumatanda na sya kaya the thought na babakuran sya thrilled her. It only means na takot itong mawala sya.

After the EB, James went home alone. He didn’t even bother to take her home. Right, he’s already engaged. Sana pala bumili sya ng sarili nyang ring..para kunware engaged na rin sya.

“Ano na nga palang pinagkakaabalahan mo?”

“I’m finishing my artworks for an exhibit.”

“I didn’t know you could paint.”

“You didn’t ask.”

Justine sighed. He knows so little about her. Ni hindi man lang nya nalaman ang province nito, kung san sya lumaki; kung nasan ang mga magulang at kapatid. Hell, he didn’t even know she could paint!

“So, when will this exhibit be happening?”

“A month from now.” She replied. “I just need to finish one piece and create another. Kaso..wala akong makitang gagawin.”

“Ano ba dapat gagawin?”

She shrugged. “Wala, kung anu-ano lang.”

Ang totoo nyan, may theme ang exhibit na yun. She just couldn’t tell him because it’s too personal. They finally got to her house. When she was about to go in, she heard him ask: “Aren’t you gonna invite me in?”

She turned to him and replied: “Pagod na ‘ko eh. Next time na lang siguro.”

She heard him sigh. “Yeah. Some other time perhaps.”

“Good night.”

“Good night.”

“Wag ka kaseng gumalaw! Ang likot mo naman eh..” Reklamo nya kay Justine. He volunteered to be her model. Pero galaw naman ito ng galaw. “Aren’t I supposed to be naked?” Makulit nitong tanong sa kanya.

She glared at him. Itinaas nito ang kamay for defense. “I’m just asking..”

“There will be kids coming. Kaya hindi pwede.”

“Okay okay.” He became still again. It’s almost two hours na nakaganun ito. Sinasadya nya yun.

“Matagal pa ba?” Tanong nito.

“Hold still. Matatapos na.”She pretended to flick. “There. It’s done.” Nakangiti nyang sabi.

After hearing this, nag-inat na si Justine at lumapit sa kanya para tingnan ang sketch nya of him. She flipped the canvas and faced it to him. Natawa sya sa reaction nito. She drew a monkey out of him. Pinilit nyang iseryoso ang mukha. “So..what do you think?”

Humaba ang nguso nito. “Aww. You didn’t like it?” She asked, acting disappointed.

“Do I really look like that?” He asked, crestfallen. If he’s acting now, he’s way better than her. She felt her heart being tugged by a million heartstrings. “It was just a joke..” She said, biting her lip.

Naupo ito sa tabi nya at hinilot ang balikat. Lalo na syang naawa dito. After all, he agreed to model for her. Sinayang lang nya ang two hours na pangangalay nito. “Masakit ba?” Tanong nya dito. He shook his head pero alam nyang masakit kase halata sa mukha nito. Sighing, she got up and massages his back. He groans and closed his eyes, relaxing beneath her hands.

“Sorry..” Sabi nya.

He chuckled. “That’s one hell of a monkey. Kung ganun kagwapo ang mga unggoy, wala ng maiinlove sa tao.”

Binatukan nya ito. “Yabang...”

He laughed. “Do I really look like that?”

“You know for a cocky guy, napaka-insecure mo.” Sabi nya lang dito.

“Alam kong gwapo ako. Gusto ko lang ikaw ang magsabi.”

“Haha..Fishing for compliment? Use better bait next time.”

He stopped her hands. “Aren’t you hungry? Kain muna tayo. Masamang ginugutom ang matakaw.”

Hinampas nya ito. “Pano ako sasama kung ganyan ka mang-invite?”

But she did go with him anyway. It’s like déjà vu. She just doesn’t know if it will last.

Cambria received an invitation from her old school. Alumni nila. It’s been 12 years na pala. Never once did she attend. Ngayon, siguradong may mga asawa or boyfriend na ang mga ka-batch nya. Except for Agui, of course. She and Agui has been friends since high school. Every 3 years, halos hilahin sya nito pauwi. She’s just been too scared to face her past. Lalo na yung ka-M.U. nya dati na hindi nag-work out. Should she go?

“What’s that?”

She glanced up to see Justine holding a bouquet of roses in his hands. “A letter.” She pointed at the flowers. “I told you I don’t eat flowers, didn’t I?”

“I know. Hindi naman para sa’yo ‘to eh.”

“Eh para kanino yan?” Had he given up on her?

“Sa vase mo.” Nakangiti nitong sabi. “Eto ang para sa’yo. Swiss chocolates.”

She gaped at the huge tin box. “Did you just say Swiss?”

“Yeah. Bakit? Ayaw mo? Ako na lang ang kakain.” Sabi nito at binuksan ang box. She hurriedly snatched it away from him. “It’s mine.”

“Pahingi naman ng isa.”

Tiningnan nya ito ng masama. “Fine. Isa lang ah.” Kumuha sya ng isa at sinubuan ito.

“One more.”

Umiling sya. “Uubusin mo lang eh..”

Pinilit nitong agawin ang box sa kanya. “Isa lang oi..”

“Naka-isa ka na eh.” Reklamo nya sabay layo dito. Naghabulan sila across the room until he finally caught her, securing her in his tight embrace. Natigilan nya when he kissed her nape and nibbled. “Fine. I’ll eat you instead.” At kinagat ang batok nya. She shivered.

Cambria didn’t recognize most of her former classmates. And as she have predicted, marami rito ag may mga asawa na. She was glad she took Justine with her or else, she’ll be out of place. Sa lumang auditorium ng school ang venue. Tanda pa nya nung napayakap sya kay Ian noon nung nanood ang klase nila ng horror. It was one of the happiest days of her life.

“Cam!” She recognized the lady who just called her. Gwyneth, her old rival. Naalala nya pa noon na lagi silang magkatalo sa first place. Pero nung grumaduate naman

sila, they became good friends naman. “My gosh! It’s really you!” Dagdag pa nito.

“Gwyn. Kumusta?” Nakangiti nyang bati dito.

Gwyn flipped her hair—for good nature. “Eto, maganda pa rin.”

Napatawa sya. Luka-luka pa rin talaga ito.

“Ikaw ang kumusta?” Gwyn’s eyes wandered towards Justine. “Asus. Kaya naman pala blooming na blooming ka eh.”

Nginitian din ito ni Justine and held out his hand. “I’m Justine. Cam’s boyfriend.” Gwyn took his hand at tinitigan ito ng malagkit. Napasimangot sya.

“Tama na nga. Nagseselos na si Camz eh.” Nakangiting sabi ni Gwyn. Hanggang ngayon talaga eh observant pa din ito. Justine looked at her. “Oo nga noh.”

Nginusuan nya ang mga ito. “Tigilan nyo ‘kong dalawa ah.”

“Cam?” Came a voice from behind. Napalingon silang tatlo. Sya ang unang nakarecognize dito. “I-Ian?”

“It is you!” Natutuwang sabi nito. Nagulat na lang sya ng yakapin sya nito. From behind him, he saw Justine looking like he’s about to kill someone. Bigla syang natuwa. She returned Ian’s embrace. She saw Justine rolled his eyes and went to get a drink. Bumitaw na sya kay Ian.

“Kumusta na?”

“Ahm..eto..okay naman.” Sabi nya. “Ikaw?”

Ian smiled, revealing his dimples. Naalala nya yung mga panahong she fantasized him. Lagi nyang iniisip na one day makikiss nya yung dimples nito. That never happened. Naka-graduate na sila’t lahat eh hindi pa rin sya nito niligawan. Sabi nung iba nag-attempt daw ito noon, pero nakabog ng kasungitan nya. Nagsisisi tuloy sya kung bakit buong buhay syang nagsusungit. “Eto, masaya. Nakita na kita eh.”

She giggled. Flirt na pala ito ngayon, nalaos na ang katorpehan.

“Cam..yung boyfriend mo, nakakailang shot na.” Gwyn whispered. Saka lang nya naalala si Justine. She saw him at the drinking table, katabi ang tatlong empty glass. Nakita rin nya sa di kalayuan yung mga kire nyang batchmate—checking him out. Bigla syang naalarma. “Ian, excuse me ah.” Nilapitan nya si Justine.

“Hey!” Hinila nya yung baso ng alak na iinumin pa sana nito. “Tama na ‘yan.”

Tiningnan sya nito. “Who’s that guy? Bakit ka nya niyakap ha?”

“That’s Ian.” Sabi nya.

“I know. But who is he to you?”

She bit her lip. Hindi na nya maiinis ‘to. He never drinks wine. Ngayon lang. He seemed to be so affected. “You’re drunk. Gusto mo ng umuwi?”

He slammed his fist at the table. Napapitlag sya. “Answer the damn question!” He commanded.

“W-wala. Classmate ko lang sya dati.”

Justine gripped her wrist. And looked at her with such intensity that she wanted to look away, pero hindi nya magawa kase hinawakan din nito ang baba nya, holding her head in place. “Is that the truth or are you just trying to make me feel better?”

“Well..ano..”

“Ano?”

“Ex-crush ko sya. P-pero wala na yun. Promise.”

Finally, he smiled. It took a while before Cambria realized what was happening. “P-pero..M.U. din kami dati.” Pilit nyang bawi.

He chuckled. “Stop trying to make me jealous. Baka maupakan ko pa yang Ian na yan.”

Umupo sya sa tabi nito. “Nagseselos ka ba?”

“Hindi ba halata?”

“Hindi.” She said. Nakita nyang sinenyasan sya ni Ian. Aktong tatayo sya ng pigilan sya ni Justine.

“No.” Sabi nito. Wala syang nagawa kaya she just gave Ian an apologetic look. Naintindihan naman nito. Nilingon nya si Justine. “Happy?” He just smirked.

Exhibit day.

Probably, one of the most important days of her life. Ever since she can remember, she always dreamed of having an exhibit of her own. And now it all came true. And thanks to her inspiration, she created the most beautiful art of her own. And speaking of which—

“I hope he likes it.” She whispered to herself as she run her fingers to the canvass.

Marami ng tao ng dumating si Justine. Holding a bouquet of flowers in his hands, he scans the place for Cam. He saw her entertaining a bunch of people. Nilapitan nya ito. “Hi.”

“Hi!” She greeted him back. Napangiti sya sa enthusiasm nito. Ilang araw din silang hindi nagkita dahil sa abala ito pag-aayos ng exhibit nya.

“Is he the model?” Narinig nyang tanong ng isa sa mga bista ni Cam. Tiningnan nya ito. “Model?” Nagtataka nyang tanong. Ngumiti lang si Cam sa kanya. “You don’t mean the monkey, right?”

“What monkey?” Nalilitong tanong ng bisista.

“Would you excuse us for a sec?” Hinila sya ni Cam palayo.

“Don’t tell me you posted that drawing?”

Tumawa si Cam. “What are you afraid of? Marami na ngang compliments na natatanggap yun eh.”

Justine looked around to find the picture. “Where is it?”

Cambria held out her hand. “I’ll take you there. Close your eyes.” He did. Hinila nya ito amidst the crowd. “No peeking.”

He chuckled. “Okay okay.”

After a few struggles, they finally managed to get to the canvass. “Now open up.”

Justine’s mouth fell open. It wasn’t the monkey. It was him, in his best look. The same exact replica. Every detail, every strand of hair was all perfect. “Do you like it?” she asked.

“Are you kidding me? I LOVE it! I never knew you were this good.”

Cam blushed. “Actually, I drew this one from my memory. A year after you left, I was trying to remember you. And then, your face just filled the paper.”

“Wow.” It was all he could say. “Ibinebenta mo rin ba yan?”

Umiling ito. “I intend to give you that as a gift. Kung...gusto mo.”

“Of course! This calls for a celebration. How about..we go out tonight?”

“Sure!”

“A gay bar?” Natatawang tanong ni Cam. “I didn’t know you had a thing for gays!”

Tinapik nito ang ulo nya. “Sira! Kaibigan ko lang yung may-ari nito. Libre tayo dito.”

“Kuripot nito.” Sabi nya. Napatawa ito.

Maya-maya pa ay nilapitan sila ng isang bakla. Nakipagbeso-beso ito kay Justine. “Justine dear! I thought you wouldn’t come!” Saka lang sya napansin nito. “Hi! You must be Cambria..”

She smiled at him. The gay led them to a table near the stage. Nang makaupo na sila ay umakyat na ito sa stage and continued on entertaining people.

“And now, I want to introduce you all to my gorgeous friend, Justine. He prepared a number for his girlfriend tonight. Palakpakan naman dyan!” The audience did as they were told. Napatingin sya kay Justine. Ngumiti lang ito at umakyat ng stage. He was handed with a guitar. Then he started strumming.

“For Cambria...This song is entitled ‘Million Ways’.” Palakpakan ulit. Then he started singing. “A million ways to say it...sometimes we just forget. Million ways to show it, with a simple look or just a kiss.” She didn’t know that he could sing! He has the most amazing voice. “A world gone crazy, I know sometimes it's just so hard to show how we feel. Believin' it is real. I would take your love and run..Hide the moon behind the sun. Just for you, just for you.”

Nakakailang minuto pa lang si Justine sa stage pero hakot na nito ang atensiyon ng tao. She couldn’t blame them. He was so charming and adorable. Nakakatangay rin ang kanta nito. And it was dedicated for her. “All the words I hadn't said, I will sing them all instead. Just for you, just for you..'Cause this is my love song...for you. This is my love song..This is my love song for . . .you...”

The crowd cheered for him as he went down the stairs. Cambria stood up and gave him a hug. “Did you like it?” He asked

“I didn’t know you could sing!”

Ngumiti ito. “Hindi ka naman kase nagtatanong eh.”

“Touché.”

They stayed for a little while at ng mga bandang alas-dyes, inihatid na sya nito. She was so tired that she literally slept the moment her back touched her bed.

Kinabukasan, Cambria woke up early, unease. Hindi nya alam kung bakit kinakabahan sya. Simula pagkagising nya ay nababalisa na sya. She hurriedly called up Justine.

After several rings, he finally answered. “Hello?” He mumbled on the other line. Kagigising lang nito. She let out a sigh of relief. “Good morning..” Bati nya dito.

“Cam, what’s wrong? It’s still...3 a.m. May problema ba?”

“Wala. I was just—nevermind. Tulog ka na ulet.”

“Hmm. Okay.”

Meet me at the restaurant. :)

The note was from Justine, along with the flowers. Umagang umaga ay ginagawa nitong flower shop ang bahay nya. She called up his cell. “Di ba sabi ko hindi ako kumakain ng bulaklak?”

He laughed. “Yeah I know. It’s an invitation.“

“Ano’ng meron?”

“Wala lang. Ayaw mo?”

“Sinabi ko bang ayaw ko? Give me 20 minutes. I’ll be there.”

Pagdating nya sa restaurant, na-notice nya agad na iba ang atmosphere. The tables were covered in pink linen. Roses were made as centerpieces. At may string quartet na tumutugtog sa corner. Ano'ng meron?

"Ma'am, this way po." The waiter led her to the table near the kitchen. Table four. Her favorite spot. When she got settled, the kitchen door burst open and a line of chefs went out, each held a certain kind of chocolate in his/her hands. Seven chocolates all in all. She recognized Belgian; Swiss, a plate of fudge brownies. The others look the same to her.

After the seven chefs came Justine, with her favorite soufflé. "Ano'ng meron?" Tanong nya.

He just shrugged. "Trip ko lang."

"Haha. Akala ko mag-po-propose ka na eh." She teased.

He smiled and handed her the soufflé, still warm. "Eat this first. Baka mag-deflate eh."

"Okay." She spooned the dessert slowly. It's been three years since she had the last one. When Justine went away, she rid herself off soufflés. Now, it tastes like heaven in her mouth. Heaven..and..rock?

Kinuha nya kung ano mang bagay yung naligaw sa bibig nya. A ring? It is a ring. And not just any other ring. It was a Tiffany, 24-carat diamond ring. "W-wha—"

Lalo pa syang nagulat ng bigla itong lumuhod sa tabi nya. "I know I'm cocky and I'm very makulit. I say 'I love you' often like it was just an ordinary phrase. But I have never been happier since I met you. You were the prettiest snob I've ever met. You often hide your emotions because you get embarrassed showing them off. I know were not the best couple in the world. In fact, we're pathetic. But I'd rather us be pathetic together than be apart. Because I know things won't ever be the same without you on my side. As I have told you before, I will never let any man take you away from me. And this is just the first step. So, will you marry me?"

Cam felt her eyes watering. "S-sorry. Wala ata akong naintindihan."

He laughed. "Just say yes."

"Yes."

He slid the ring into her finger, goot up and kissed her. The crowd went, "Awwwww." There were a lot of hooting and cheerings from the kitchen staff. But amidst of all the celebration, alam nyang may kulang. "Si Mishe?"

“i’m right here.” Came Mishe’s voice. She and James entered the restaurant, beaming. Agad nya itong nilapitan at niyakap. “I missed you bestfriend.” Sabi nya dito.

“Aw. I missed you more.” Mishe kissed her on the cheek. “I’m so glad hindi ka na tatandang dalaga.”

Napatawa sya. “Adik ka talaga.”

“Alam ko. Kaya nga mahal mo ‘ko eh.”

Tumikhim si Justine. Nilapitan ito ni Mishe at niyakap. “Congratulations pinsan.” She heard her say.

“Same to you pinsan.” Sabi naman nito na ipinagtaka nya. She looked at James with a frown. James grinned and then she finally understands. “You’re her fiance!”

Napatawa silang tatlo. Justine spoke. “i was surprised it took you so long to figure it out.”

She pouted. “Hindi naman kase ako manghuhula eh.”

“Cam. Let’s go.” Hinila sya ni Justine palabas ng restaurant.

“Where are we going?” Takang tanong nya dito.

“Tagaytay.” He replied.

“You know, three years ago, I accidentally made a wish. And I think my wish came true.”

She looked at him. “What did you wish for?” She asked.

He stared at the stars. “ I wished na sana araw-araw na lang birthday ko..para araw-araw mo ‘kong ngingitian.”

She smiled. “I love you Justine.”

He looked at her. “Can you say that again?”

“I love you.” She said.

“Isa pa nga..” Nakangiti nitong pakiusap.

Tumawa sya. “I love y--” She was cut off by his lips. Her heart palpitated. “I love you too.” He said after that.

The end na ulit :)

==========

SAVE YOU

Hi!!! :) I've added this story kase ewan... haha,,, naging gloomy naman ako bigla. And since hindi ko pa madugsungan yung iba at hindi sya matanggal sa isip ko... eto sya ngayon. Hope you don't get too depressed. ^^v

--

All she wanted in her life was to be given a chance to live it as she wants to. But nobody gave her that chance...

--

She covered her ears to baffle the sound of crying, bickering and smashing that’s coming from downstairs. Kagaya kahapon at ng mga nauna pang araw at ng mga nagdaang panahon, nag-aaway na naman ang mga magulang nya. Ang tatay nya ay isang batugan, walang ginawa kundi mag-inom maghapon. Minsan dumadayo ito ng tong its sa kapitbahay. Lahat ng pera na iniipon ng nanay nya na pampaaral sana sa kanila ay napupunta sa mga bisyo ng kanyang ama.

Ang kuya nya, nakakulong dahil nahulihan ng drugs. Ang ate nya... buntis at iniwanan ng boyfriend. Dagdag pakainin na naman, reklamo ng nanay nya. Ang bunso nyang kapatid... pagala-gala sa kalsada, nanghihingi ng pera para sa kumakalam na sikmura.

At sya?

Heto... umiiyak na lang.

She was so tired of all of these. Sometimes she wishes she was never born. Kung alam lang nya sana na ganito ang magiging buhay nya... sana ay noon pa sya bumitiw.

Unable to take any more of the situation, she gets her bag and ran downstairs. School na lang ang nagpapanatili ng katinuan nya. Doon sya pupunta. Sa lugar na masaya...

--

He saw her enter the campus. Mugto ang mata at halatang kaiiyak. He wanted so bad to go to her and offer some comfort pero hindi nya magawa kase hindi sya nito kilala. She was in her fourth year in college. He was in third year. Magka-department sila.

It was her last year in the school yet hanggang ngayon, he still hadn’t mustered the courage to talk to her. He knew her of course. Balitang-balita kase ang pagiging problemado nito sa buhay. Many students gossip about her.

She had no friends.

She was a loner... palaging nasa sulok at nakatulala. Maraming beses na silang nagkakasalubong sa hallway pero palaging derecho ang tingin nito, lampas sa kanya.

He, on the other hand, was quite popular. Gwapo kase sya. At kapag gwapo, pansinin. Pero hindi nya maisip kung bakit kahit isang beses lang... hindi sya mapansin nito.

--

She was walking, she thinks... while her head was somewhere else. Gulo-gulo ang buhok nya at alam nyang namumugto ang mga mata nya. Alam nya rin na pinag-uusapan sya palagi ng mga tao. Minsan, gusto nya silang sigawan. Mga pakialamero kase... Ano bang alam nila?

At dahil nga nasa malayo ang isip nya, hindi nya agad napansin that she was walking towards a post. Mabuti na lang at may humila sa kanya.

She looked up and saw a pair of eyes looking down at her. He was wearing her favorite smile and her heart skipped a beat or two.

“Okay ka lang ba?” Tanong nito sa kanya. She nodded in response at saka nagpatuloy paglalakad.

He was someone that she’d always want but could never have. A girl like her could never have anything she wants.

--

He was still shaken. Shaken by her stare and the gravity that pulled him to her. She was about to hit a post and no one seemed to mind. So he saved her. She didn’t even say thanks. She just stared at him with her teary eyes saka tumango. It was far from what he’d imagined but he wasn’t surprised with her reaction.. or lack of it.

She was a girl of a few words. Kapag pwedeng hindi magsalita, hindi sya magsasalita. He guessed that it’s one of the reasons why she grows sadder every day.

She was always a mess. Messy hair, messy things... messy life. He wanted to see her smile even for once pero parang napaka-imposible.

--

At home, akala nya tapos na. Pero ano’ng nadatnan nya? She saw her father lying in the sofa, beer in hand. She called for her mother. Hinanap nya rin ito sa kusina, sa labahan, sa kwarto nito... pero hindi nya ito makita.

But what she saw devastated her more.

Her mother’s clothes were gone. At alam na nya kung ano’ng ibig sabihin nun. She felt her legs crumble and she fell on the floor, so are her tears.

--

The next day, he was expecting her. He was about to talk to her. Mahirap na, baka maubusan na sya ng chances. He was waiting for her near the gate of the school. Lumipas ang maghapon... pero hindi nya ito nakita.

Kinabukasan, he did the same. Still, he didn’t see her.

He didn’t see her all week. And it made him so sad. But he can’t do anything. Hindi naman nya alam kung san ang bahay nito. He didn’t know her number. He only knows her name... and everything else that he’d observed about her.

--

Her last hope... ran away. This is just too much for her...

Dear life, how cruel of you.

She felt a slice of pain as she carves these words on her arm. She felt herself giving up. She wanted out. She just can’t take it anymore...

Sabi nila, God won’t give you problems that you can’t handle. She smiled bitterly as she remembered that. Maybe God didn’t consider her strengths. Maybe He expected too much from her. Clearly, she wasn’t as strong as He thought she would be.

“Sana lang, sa next life, mas maganda na ang buhay ko. I’ve suffered like hell in this lifetime; maybe it’ll be different on the next. Goodbye world... don’t cry for me...”

Don’t waste your tears.

She felt herself weaken as she let the blood flow from her open wrist. She waited for life to flash before her eyes but all she saw was the blurring image of her dry-painted wall. It wasn’t that much of a life anyway... Sayang lang ang flashback. It won’t bring her any guilt for ending her life...

Her life...

She laughed for the first and last time.

--

Nagulat sya ng biglang may nag-excuse sa klase nila, nanghihingi ng donation. Para daw sa namatay nilang classmate.

“Sino’ng patay?” Tanong nya dun sa fourth year.

When they told him, he stood in shock. Nagtataka yung mga classmate nya sa kanya but he didn’t care. He ran outside, blinded by his tears; he didn’t know where he was going. But he kept on running anyway.

At last, he was stopped by an uprooted tree. Nadapa sya. How he wished na sana sa pagbagsak nya, tumama na lang sa bato ang ulo nya or something that would render an instant kill. But instead, he landed on the soft ground... and he knew... it wasn’t his time to die.

He didn’t stand up.

As he was lying there, he saw her image. She was lying beside him, smiling for the first time, like a beautiful angel he always knew she was.

He reached for her. She reached back. And he cried more tears when he saw her open wrist. It was covered in dried blood but she was still smiling.

When he finally touched her hand... he felt everything around him fade into black.

I wished that I had the courage to save you. Sorry... I realized now that I was too late.

==========

AMATS (one shot slurred confession)

Another shot. Another round. Lasing na si Sophia...

“Ano Sophie? Kaya pa?” Tanong sa kanya ni Jepoy. Nag-iinom sila sa balkonahe ng bahay nito.

“Mukha bang kaya ko?!” She asked in a slurred manner. Nakaka-dalawang bote na sila ng Empi lights but it looks like she had no intention of stopping. Earlier that day kase, nahuli nyang nangangaliwa ang boyfriend nya. Sa may park pa, sa karamihan ng tao... hindi na nahiya! At ayun, yun pa ang may ganang makipag-break sa kanya.

Umuwi sya ng bahay na mabigat ang loob. Kabado syang baka maabutan nya ang mama nya dun. Panigurado kaseng magtatanong ito kung bakit sya busangot. At siguradong magsasabi at magsasabi sya dito ng problema kahit ayaw nya. Eh bungangera ang mama nya. Baka masugod pa nun yung ex nya. Naku... kakahiya yun.

But she found Jepoy instead.

“Ano’ng ginagawa mo dito?” Mataray nyang tanong.

“Hindi ka binibisita.” Sabi nito, saka ngumiti.

“Umuwi ka na.”

“Ayoko.”

She looked at him, with the resigned expression on her face. “Pwede bang bukas ka na lang mambwisit?” She headed to the door. Hinarang sya nito.

“Bakit malungkot ka ata?”

“Pakealam mo ba?!” She felt her tears swelling..at ayaw nyang umiyak sa harapan ni Jepoy.

Sumeryoso ang mukha nito. “May pakealam ako kase hindi ko gawa yan. Kung may magpapaiyak man sa ‘yo, ako lang dapat yon..”

Tumulo ang isa at sinundan ng marami pang luha.

“Hoyhoy! Wag kang umiyak!”

“Tanga ka ba? Tingin mo gusto kong umiyak?!”

“Bakit ka ba kase bigla-biglang umiiyak?” Tinapik-tapik nito ang likod nya.

At ayun... kay Jepoy sya nakapagkwento.

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.

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“Sigurado ka bang gusto mong uminom?” Tanong nito sa kanya habang binubuksan ang isang bote ng Empi light.

“Pwede ka namang umuwi kung ayaw mo ‘kong damayan eh.”

He sighed. “Ayoko..sumasakit ang tenga ko sa ‘min. Mina-murder na naman ni ninang ang videoke namin.”

“Parang hindi sintunado ang nanay mo ah.”

“Haha. Mag-bestfriend nga.”

Magbestfriend ang mga mama nila. Since grade one. Tapos yung mama at papa ni Jepoy, mutual friend ang papa nya. Ipinakilala nila dun yung mama nya.

Ayun, kaya magbebestfriends ang mga magulang nila. Pati sila ni Jepoy. Wala syang choice eh.. Pareho pa silang only child.

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“Sino na nga ba ‘yung teacher natin dati na laging namimingot?”

“Si Mrs. Gaitan.” Sagot nya. “And F.Y.I. lang po..ikaw lang ang napipingot nya.”

“Ako lang ba?” Tumawa ito. “Kaya pala humaba na ng humaba ang tenga ko.”

Ngumiti sya. “Pilyo ka kase..naalala mo nung lagi mong hinihila yung buhok ko?”

“Those were the glorious days. Hindi kumpleto ang araw ko ng hindi ka napapaiyak...”

**

1ST GRADE

Lagi ni Jepoy hinihila ang buhok ni Sophia dahil sa kinatutuwaan nito ang pagkaka-tirintas ng buhok nya. Tapos lagi syang magsusumbong dahil masakit nga naman. Tapos mag-aaway sila..tulad ngayon...

“Teacher! Teacher! Si Jepoy po hinihila ‘yung hair ko!”

Iiling na lang si Mrs. Paredes. Hayyy...eto na naman sila.

Bumirit uli ng isang hila si Jepoy.

Pumalirit na ng iyak si Sophia.

“Jepoy tama na yan.” Saway ng teacher. Ngumiti lang ang batang si Jepoy habang umiiyak si Sophia.

**

**

2ND GRADE

Hapon noon. Matatapos na ang klase ng biglang binato si Jepoy si Sophia ng nilukot na papel.

“Aray!” Nilingon nya ito at pinulot ang papel na ibinato sa kanya at saka ibinato dito.

“Hindi naman masakeeeet! Bleeeh!!!”

Sumimangot si Sophia..saka umiyak.

**

Pangalawang bote..

“Hindi mo binuklat yung papel noh?” Tanong nito sa kanya matapos magsalin ng alak sa tagayan. Umiling sya.

“Bakit? Ano ba’ng meron dun?”

Nagkibit-balikat si Jepoy. “Wala..drawing.”

**

3RD GRADE

Dahil sa public school nag-aaral sina Sophia at Jepoy, lagi silang magkasama sa klase. Pwede kaseng mamili ng teacher ang mga magulang. Eh mag-bestfriend ang mga mama nila simula pagkabata. Ninong pa ni Jepoy sa BSP ang papa ni Sophia. Kaya hindi pwedeng hindi sila magkaklase.

Isang araw, nag-announce ang teacher na magkakaroon sila ng class presentation. Magsasayaw daw sila ng cariñosa.

“Sophie, partners tayo ah.” Sabi ni Jepoy sa kanya.

“Ayoko nga!”

“Bakit?” Kunot na noong tanong nito.

“Kase bad ka! Tsaka hindi ka naman marunong magsayaw eh!”

Sumimangot ito sa kanya. “Bahala ka! Si Jade na lang ipa-partner ko!”

**

“Oo. Si Jade na walang malay.”

“Haha. Nagselos ka ba?”

“Ngek! Naawa kamo. Biruin mong panay ang reklamo noon. Ginawa mo daw dance floor ang paa nya..”

“Kung makapagsalita sya parang hindi nangangaliwa yung paa nya.”

**

6TH GRADE

Si Jepoy ang kauna-unahang nagka-girlfriend sa klase nila. Si Louise..transferee sa school nila. Kulot ang buhok nito na medyo brown tapos ubod ng puti. Kaso nag-break din sila noong graduation.

**

“Nagtampo ako sa ‘yo noon eh.”

“Bakit?”

“Kase hindi mo ako isinayaw! Sa dami ng party sa school ni hindi mo man lang ako niyayayang sumayaw. Porke’t sikat ka na nun..”

Halos kalahati na lang ang laman ng bote. May isa pa silang uubusin...

Umiling-iling si Jepoy. “Sabi mo, di ba, ayaw mo ‘kong ka-partner? Tapos nag-eexpect ka na isasayaw kita?!”

“Grade 3 pa ‘yun noh!”

**

1ST YEAR HIGH SCHOOL

“Akala mo naman napakagwapo. Kung makangiti..naku!”

“Ahem!”

Tinaasan nya ng kilay ang kaklaseng si Lorraine.

“At ano’ng ikinagagalit?” Tanong nito.

“Wala.”

“Alam mo, kung iintayin mo syang mag-aya..aba’y mabubutas ang bangkuan mo neng! Lapitan mo na.”

“Ayoko nga! Bakit ako ang lalapit eh babae ako?”

Lorraine crossed her arms and smirked. “Eh di si Jepoy nga. Halata ka na friend!”

“Sya lang ba ang lalaki dyan? Malay mo si Emerson pala ‘yung tinutukoy ko. O kaya si Ray.”

Napatawa ng mahina si Lorraine. “Ako pa niloko mo eh hindi ka naman nakatingin kay Emerson.”

“Eh di kay Ray!” Palusot nya.

“Absent po kaya si Ray.”

Saka lang nya ito nilingon. “Ah, absent ba? Hindi ko napansin.”

**

“Paano naman kita isasayaw eh papalapit pa lang ako, umiirap ka na?”

“Eh paano akong hindi iirap? Isinayaw mo na lahat ng katabi ko. Una si Marjorie, tapos si Lorraine--”

“Kase nga nang-iirap ka!”

“Eh kase nga hindi mo ako isinasayaw!”

“Tumagay ka na nga lang.” Inabutan sya nito ng tagayan.

**

2ND YEAR HIGH SCHOOL

Nagkaroon ng second girlfriend si Jepoy..si Lorraine.

“Friend, sure ka okay lang sa ‘yo?” Laging tanong sa kanya ni Lorraine bago nito tuluyang sinagot si Jepoy. Crush na crush kase ni Lorraine si Jepoy simula noong unang araw ng pasukan ng second year. Pano tumangkad ito ng ilang inches..

“Oo nga. Ang kulit mo naman eh..sabi ko na sa’yong hindi ko type yan.”

“Baka kase hindi mo lang maamin.”

“Para kang tanga.”

Ngumiti ito. “Sige ah. No hard feelings.”

**

“Wala nga ba?”

“Wala.”

“Kahit ganto kaunti?” Itinaas ni Jepoy ang tagayan na hanggang kalahati ang laman. Umiling sya. Ininom nito ang kalahati saka itinaas ng one-fourth na ang laman.. “Eh ganto?”

She rolled her eyes..kaya lalo syang nahilo. Oh, what the hell? Kapag inamin naman nya, sigurado namang malilimutan na ni Jepoy ‘pag linaw na sila...

“Hmmmm....slight. As in...super konti.”

Nginitian sya nito. Ayaw man nya aminin sa sarili nya, hindi nakukumpleto ang araw nya kapag hindi sya nito inaasar. Kahit na noong may girlfriend ito ay sya lang talaga ang inaasar nito..kaya feeling nya special sya.

“Eh ngayon?”

“Naku Jefferson..tigil-tigilan mo ko!”

“Eeeee...meron pa noh?”

“So? Ano ngayon kung meron?”

Biglang natigilan si Jepoy at parang nalinawan ng konti.

“Is that alcohol talking?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

“O ngayon ayaw mo maniwala? Abnormal!”

“Seryoso?”

“Whatever. Tutulog na ‘ko.” Tumayo sya sa sahig at nagtungo sa sofa. Doon na lang sya matutulog dahil hindi nya na kayang umakyat ng hagdan sa sobrang hilo.

**

4TH YEAR HIGH SCHOOL- GRADUATION

“Sophie, papicture tayo.” Aya nito sa kanya.

Sinundan nya ito sa stage, dala-dala ang camera nya. Close-up ang kuha nito kaya magkadikit na kinunan ang mukha nila. Para syang kinukuryente noon.. ‘Yun lang ang picture nilang matino. Kapag kase kinukunan sila ng magkasama, lagi nitong hinihila ang buhok nya. Hindi sya nito tinitigilan hangga’t hindi pa masama ang pose nya.

**

KINABUKASAN, ARAW NG SABADO..

Nagising na lamang si Sophia na nasa sarili na nyang kwarto. She remembered everything from last night. Hindi pala totoo ‘yung kapag nalasing, walang maalala..kase sya tandang-tanda nya. O baka naman sya lang ‘yun... But she didn’t remember getting up and going to her own room. Hmmm...

“Good morning.” Biglang bati sa kanya ng nagkakape na si Jepoy.

“B-bakit nandito ka pa?” Gulat nyang tanong.

“Ngayon ka pa nagulat.. after ilang years na inilalagi ko dito?”

“A-akala ko kase umuwi ka na. Andyan na ba si mama?”

Umiling ito. “Wala. Kaya ipinagsaing na kita at nagluto na rin ako ng ulam. Here.. take a sip.” Inabutan sya nito ng isang mug ng kape. “Itinapon ko na rin ‘yung mga bote.. buti na lang hindi tayo sumuka..”

She drank the coffee tapos ibinalik nya dito yung baso.

“Bakit hindi ka umuwi? Baka hinahanap ka na sa inyo.”

“Bakit? Ang mama mo nga hindi umuuwi..hinahanap mo ba?”

“Adik ka talaga... matanda na yun noh.”

“Tingin mo sa ‘kin... bata?” Natatawa nitong tanong sa kanya habang humihigop ng kape.

“Isip bata kamo. Umuwi ka na!”

“Ayaw! Kung gusto mo ikaw ang umuwi sa ‘min!”

“Abnormal ka talaga! Bahay nyo uuwian ko? Adik ka ba?”

“Mapilit ka kase... eh di ikaw ang umuwi.”

Pinamay-awangan nya ito. “Sya sige, yaman din lamang na ayaw mong umuwi... eh di ipagtimpla mo ‘ko ng kape.”

“Wow. Achay lang?”

“Alam mo bading ka talaga.” Nakangiti nyang sabi dito.

He rolled his eyes. “Bakit na naman?”

She crinkled her nose. “Wala. Para ka kaseng hindi lalake.”

“Weh?” Tumayo si Jepoy at sumandal sa pader. “Gusto mo maghubo ako ngayon sa harap mo?”

Pinandilatan nya ito. “Gusto mong mamatay?”

Tumawa ito at iniabot sa kanya ang iniinom na kape. Kinuha naman nya yun at iinom sana pero nakita nyang wala ng laman. Sinimangutan nya ito.

“Ansama mo.”

“Abah. Ako na nagsaing at nagluto, ako pa masama?”

“Psh.” Pouting, she took the mug on the kitchen counter saka sya nagtimpla ng kape. Tumabi ito sa kanya.

“Nga pala...”

“Oh?”

“Yung kagabi... totoo yun?”

Bigla syang kinabahan. “Ang alin?”

“Yung sinabi mo.”

Kumunot ang noo nya. “Ha? Alin dun?”

“May gusto ka pa rin sa ‘kin?” Derecho nitong tanong sa kanya.

“HAAAAAA?! KELAN KO SINABI?” Exaggerated nyang tanong. Halos magtakip na ito ng tenga sa lakas ng boses nya.

Tapos bigla itong tumingin sa kanya ng seryoso. “Seryoso Sophie...”

“Seryoso Jepoy! Wala ako matandaan!” Kunware lang yun. Wala nga syang hindi maalala eh. Akala lang nya hindi ito makakaalala. Kase lahat ng napapanuod at nababasa nya sa libro na lasing... walang maalala.

Akala nya ganun din sila.

Kinuha nito ang kape nya na kakatimpla lang at ibunubo sa lababo.

“Hoy! Ba’t mo tinapon?!”

Bumuntong-hininga ito saka itinuon ang dalawang kamay sa edge ng counter. “Sophia...”

Napalunok sya ng marinig ang pangalan nya. Hindi Sophie ang tawag nito sa kanya. Nakakapanibago. After what seemed like forever na pagpipilit nyang tawagin sya nito sa pangalan nya... ngayong nagawa na nito... iba pala ang dating.

“B-Bakit?”

“Seryosong tanong...”

Napalunok ulet sya. Takteng yan... lasa pang alak ang bibig nya. “O-Oh?”

“Yung kagabi—“

Tumingin ito sa kanya.

“—totoo ba?”

“Bakit mo ba tinatanong? Wala lang yun... lasing lang ata ako.”

“Ah...”

“Akin na nga yang baso. Magtitimpla ako ng bago. ‘Wag mo na itatapon ah.” Kinuha nya yung baso na nasa lababo pa. Pero hinarang sya nito ng papalayo na sana sya. Kaya ang pwesto nila, parehong nakaharap sa lababo, nakahawak pareho sa iisang baso.

Tumingin sya dito.

“Jepoy...” Naiinis nyang simula.

“Ako na magtitimpla.” Sabi nito sabay hila ng baso. Bumitiw sya. Pagkalagay nito ng kape at asukal sa baso, may kinuha ito sa tokador na nasa bandang ulunan nya.

Nagulat sya ng makita ang isang bote ng Empi lights. May konti pang laman. Isinalin nito yung laman sa baso nya, saka hinaluan ng mainit na tubig. Tapos hinalo. At iniabot sa kanya.

“Oh.”

Napangiwi sya. “Ano yan?”

“Malamang kape.”

“Ba’t mo nilagyan ng alak?!”

“Para malasing ka.”

Binatukan nya ito. “Adik ka. May hangover pa nga ‘ko, lalasingin mo na naman.”

He pouted saka ibinubo na naman yung katitimplang kape sa lababo.

“Oh! Ba’t mo na naman tinapon?!”

Tumingin ito sa kanya na parang blank lang ang expression. “Bakit? Iinumin mo ba?”

Umiling sya. Disgusted at the fact na iinumin nya yun. Kape at alak? Eww lang masyado?

“Oh... hindi naman pala eh. Para sa’n pa?”

“Eh ba’t mo pa kase tinimpla? Nasasayang lang kape namin eh.”

He sighed. Saka tumingin sa cupboard na ka-level lang ng ulo nito. “Matino ka kaseng kausap ‘pag lasing.”

“Huh?”

Tumitig ito sa kanya. “Kapag lasing ka... you’re very honest.”

Hala. Natigilan sya dun sandali. Pinipilit isipin kung ano-ano yung mga nasabi nya dito kagabi. Baka naman kase nakakapagsalita sya ng tulog. Eh maraming beses na yung nangyayare sa kanya.

Kaya nga nalaman ng mama nya na may crush sya kay Jepoy eh. Secret pa naman yun...

“Jepz...”

“Oh?”

“May... may sinabi ba ‘ko kagabi habang natutulog ako?”

He smirked. “Madami. Nobela pa nga eh. Naupo ka pa tapos kinwento mo ‘ko. Para kang tanga.”

Namilog ang bibig nya pati mata. “WEH?!”

Tumawa ito. “Oo nga!”

“Ano sinabi ko?!”

“Sabi mo ‘crush pa din kita Jepoy! Since grade one pa! Akala ko nawala na pero

hindi pa pala.’” He said while imitating her voice and actions.

“Tado ka. Wala ako sinasabing ganyan.”

“Meron kaya! Naka-record pa nga eh. Gusto mong tingnan? Yayakap-yakap ka pa nga sa ‘kin kagabi.”

She slapped her forehead. “Lasing nga kase ako.” Naidahilan na lang nya.

“Pero sabi ni Ninang crush mo daw talaga ako.”

“Waaaah?!!!! Sinabi sa ‘yo ni mama?!”

Tumawa ito sa reaksiyon nya saka naiiling na sinabi. “Sabi ko na nga ba. Tsk. Galing mo magtago. Wala talaga ‘kong kaalam-alam.”

Napayuko sya.

“Oh ngayong alam mo na... ano’ng gagawin mo?” Tanong nya dito.

“May dapat ba ‘kong gawin?”

“Oo nga naman. Haha... Wala. Kalimutan mo na.”

Inakbayan sya nito. “Kain na tayo? Gutom na ‘ko.”

“Ako din eh. Ano ba ulam?”

“Daing.”

Sumimangot sya. “Daing? Nangangasim na sikmura ko tapos daing pa kakainin ko?”

“Bangus.”

“Ah... pala naman eh.” Daing na bangus lang kase ang daing na kinakain nya. Mabuti na lang at alam ni Jepoy yun. San naman kaya ito nakakuha ng daing eh wala naman silang stock na daing? “San—“

“Palengke.” Sabi nito na parang alam na ang itatanong nya.

“Nagpunta kang palengke? Anong oras ka ba nagising?”

Nagpungas ito. “Hindi pa ‘ko nakakatulog.”

“Ha? Tange nito. Ba’t di ka natulog?”

He looked at her with an annoyed expression. “Pano ‘ko makakatulog eh bangon ka ng bangon kagabi? Lumabas ka pa nga ng bahay eh. Hanep ka rin kase mag-sleep walk.”

Napakamot sya ng ulo. Oo nga pala, isa rin syang dakilang sleep walker. Sleep talker na, sleep walker pa. Kaya hindi sya pinapasama ng mama nya sa mga overnights o camping sa school eh.

“Sorry, napuyat ka tuloy.” Saka nya napansin ang mata nito. Medyo maitim nga yung ilalim ng mata nito at parang bangag pa. Gawa nya.

Ginulo nito ang buhok nya.

“Ayos lang yun, best friend kita eh.” Sabi nito saka ngumiti sa kanya..

She smiled at him too. Siguro nga hanggang mag-bestfriends na lang sila. Pero ayos na rin yun. Ang sarap kayang maging best friend ni Jepoy. Maalaga.

“Sya... kumain na tayo...”

.

.

.

Pagkatapos nila kumain, sabay pa silang naghugas ng pinggan. Tapos nag-tooth brush sila ng sabay din. May sarili kaseng tooth brush si Jepoy sa bahay nila. Pati sya meron din sa bahay nito.

“Uwi ka na.”

“Mamaya. Liligo pa ‘ko.”

“Nah! Dun ka na maligo sa inyo!”

“Dito na! Lalayo pa ‘ko eh dyan lang ang banyo!” Sabi nito sabay turo sa banyo nila na katabi lang ng kusina.

“Eeeeh... liligo na rin ako weh.”

“Problema ba yun? Eh di sabay tayo!”

Sa sinabi nito, hindi nya napigilang manapak. “Abuso ka na ah!”

Tumawa ito. “Asus! Nahiya pa. Matagal ko ng nakita yan!”

Hinampas nya ito sa balikat. “Heh! Bata pa tayo nun! Iba na ngayon noh!”

“Weh? Ba’t parang flat pa din naman? Patingin nga kung may nabago talaga...” He said saka hinila yung kwelyo ng damit nya. Dagli nyang pinalis ang kaay nito.

“Ang bastos mo!”

“Haha! Joke lang! Wala namang makikita dyan eh.”

Sinimangutan nya ito. Alam naman kase nyang flat-chested sya pero kelangan pa talagang i-point out?

“Umuwi ka na nga!”

“Yeeee... nagtatampo!” Pinisil-pisil nito ang pisngi nya. Sya naman, todo palis ng kamay nito. “Sige... uuwi na ‘ko.”

“Sya... uwi na!” Itinulak nya ito palabas ng kitchen... papunta ng sala tapos palabas ng pintuan ng bahay nila. Humawak si Jepoy sa frame ng pinto para hindi tuluyang maitulak palabas.

“Saglet lang naman!”

“Oh bakit?”

Hindi ito agad nagsalita.

“Haynaku. Umuwi ka na kase ng makaligo na ‘ko.”

Tumitig muna ito sa kanya. Tapos saka ito tumungo. Akala naman nya kung anong gagawin nito. Nagulat na lang sya ng biglang hinalikan na pala sya nito.

Wala syang masabi. Hindi na sya nakapagsalita. Even when he broke the kiss, tameme lang sya.

Ngumiti ito sa kanya.

“Sige... uwi na ‘ko.”

Pagkasabi nito ay kusa na itong bumitaw sa pintuan at naglakad palabas ng gate. Nag-wave pa ito sa kanya bago tuluyang umalis.

Lutang... isinara nya yung pinto at naupo sa sala. Sa bandang ulunan ng hinigaan

nya kagabi, may napansin syang mga papel. Crumpled na yun. Malamang eh binabato sya nito kagabi habang natutulog sya.

Binuklat nya yun isa-isa.

YOU

BESTFRIEND

I

LOVE

Saka nya ini-arrange.

I LOVE YOU BESTFRIEND

Ni-rearrange nya ulet.

BESTFRIEND I LOVE YOU

Napangiti sya.

Then she heard the phone ring.

“Hello?”

“Oi. Punta ‘ko dyan mamaya ah.”

“Kakauwi mo lang pupunta ka na naman dito?”

She heard him chuckle. “Sorry naman. Namiss agad kita eh.”

“Tss. Namiss daw...”

“Haha.. totoo nga. Ayaw pa maniwala. Sige, ligo ka na. Ang baho mo.”

“Heh! Mas mabaho ka!”

Tumawa si Jepoy sa kabilang linya.

“Ui... sige na. I’ll see you later.”

“Sige sige.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

And with that smile on her face, nagpunta na syang banyo para maligo.

*end na. haha ^_____^*

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Impromptu Elevator Ride

Stressed!

Pasyahan pagdadaldalan ang mga tao sa likuran ko. Palibhasa kase lunch break. At ako? Naiirita! Hindi ko alam! Basta walang kwenta ‘tong araw na ‘to! Wala! At naiinis ako dahil... naiinis ako dahil unti-unti kong napapansin yung officemate ko. Yun nga! Yun nga siguro yung dahilan kung bakit aborido ako ngayong araw.

Hindi ko alam kung kelan sya dumating. O kung regular ba sya. O kung temporary lang ding katulad ko. Hindi ko alam pero last week ko lang sya nakita.

Hindi sya katangkaran, mas matangkad lang ng konti sa ‘kin. Hindi rin sya kaputian pero maputi. Nakaayos yung buhok nya. Spike spike effect pa na parang sa anime. Mukhang alaga sa gel.

Nung una ko syang nakita, simpleng white polo at black slacks lang ang suot nya. Gulat ako kase halos isang buwan na ‘ko dito pero noon ko lang sya nakita.

At mula nung araw na yun, palagi na syang nakikita ng mata ko. Hindi ko sinasadya. Swear! Tuwing pupunta lang ako ng CR ng girls at pag babalik, nasusulyapan ko sya. Hindi ko sinasadya yun swear!

Kasalanan ko bang kita sya mula sa dinadaanan ko?

Naaasar ako ngayon kase parang kanina pa ako kinukuryente. Yung feeling mo na may nakatingin sa ‘yo. Pero syempre imposibleng sya yun kase hindi ako kita mula sa kinauupuan nya. Not unless nakatayo lang sya. Eh bakit naman nya gagawin yun di ba?

Lunch break. Tapos na ‘kong kumain. May baon kase ako eh. At eto nga, dahil tapos na akong kumain ng lunch, wala na akong magawa. Yung ginagawa ko sa PC ang bagal mag-process. Eh yun lang yung ginagawa ko. So kada process ko, hintay. At sa kada hintay ko, nababaliw ako sa kaiisip ng gagawin para malibang.

Kanina pa nga ako basa ng basa sa Wattpad eh. Kaso nagsawa na ‘ko.

Kanina, nagsulat na rin ako pero... nakakatamad. Pwede ko namang i-type na lang ang sinusulat ko. Di ba? Di pa sayang ang ink.

At tuloy pa rin sila sa pag-iingay sa likuran ko.

Haaay... ano ba kaseng pwede kong gawin ngayon?

Makababa kaya sa first floor? Tapos ano? Eh di aakyat ulit. Haha. Gusto kong mag-

hagdan kaso 50th floor pa kami. Kamusta naman. Baka uwian na’t lahat, hindi pa rin ako nakakabalik.

So ang ginawa ko, lumabas ako ng office namin papunta dun sa lugar na may mga elevator.

beep

Narinig kong may nag-open ng pintuan namin with their ID. Hindi ko na tiningnan kung sino. Nakatalikod kase ako dun sa glass door. Nakaharap ako dun sa mga elevator.

With my peripheral vision, I saw a pair of black shoes on my right. Pero hindi ko pa rin tiningnan kung sino yun. Basta alam ko lalaki. All the more na dapat hindi ako tumingin.

Ewan ko... ilang ako sa mga lalaki eh.

NBSB. Pasensya naman.

ding!

Umilaw yung part na katabi nung isang elevator, indicating na nasa floor na namin yun. Too bad pataas. Pero sige na nga, naghahanap na rin lang ako ng gagawin eh. Eto na yun.

Round trip.

Sumakay ako. May limang koreanong nakasakay. Sumandal ako sa gilid at pumikit. Ang ingay nila! Wala naman akong maintindihan sa sinasabi. Mabuti sana kung may subtitle eh di naaliw pa ‘ko sa pakiki-chismis.

Please step away from the closing doors.

Pinindot nung isa yung close button para magsara na yung pintuan ng biglang may pumigil. Di ko na tiningnan kung sino. Hindi ako interesado.

53rd floor.

Lumabas na yung dalawang koreano.

Sumara ulit yung pintuan ng elevator saka umandar ulit.

55th floor.

Lumabas na yung natitirang tatlo.

Natahimik bigla. Salamat naman.

“Hay salamat. Natahimik din.” Narinig kong sabi ng isang boses. Oo nga pala. May kasama pa akong isa. Tiningnan ko yung nagsalita.

At laking gulat ko ng makita ko kung sino.

SYA!

Yung taong nagpapawindang sa ‘kin this past few days! Yung lalaking ayaw na ayaw ko sanang makita!

Ngumiti sya sa ‘kin. At dahil sa tanga ako, nag-iwas ako ng tingin. Sabi nila kapag nag-iiwas daw ako ng tingin, mukhang nang-iirap ako. Pero hayaan na. Lumalakas lang ang tibok ng puso ko kapag nagagawi sa kanya yung tingin ko.

At ayoko ng ganito. LASON sya sa sistema.

Sumipol-sipol pa sya. Punyemas. Ini-imagine ko ngang solo ko lang ang elevator tapos sisipol-sipol sya.

“San punta mo?” Nagulat ako ng bigla syang magsalita. Ako ba kausap nya? Malamang noh? Kami lang kayang dalawa ang laman ng elevator. Alangan namang multo! Aynako. Pinangilabutan ako sa naisip ko.

“Suplada.” Narinig kong sabi nya saka sya bumuntong-hininga. Ayoko namang isipin nya na suplada ako kase... kabago-bago ko tapos ganun yung magiging impression nila sa ‘kin?

“Ground floor.” Mahina kong sabi.

“Ah... maglalunch?” Tss. Bakit nya ba kase ako kinakausap? Di na lang nya kausapin

ang sarili nya gaya ng ginagawa ko.

“Tapos na.” Maikli kong sagot. Hindi ko pa rin sya tinitingnan. Nakasandal pa rin ako sa wall ng elevator. Taka nga ako kung bakit walang sumasakay eh. Lunch break naman.

Going down.

Ay taeh. Kaya naman pala. Going down pa lang. Ilang floors ba kase ang building na ‘to at napakatagal ng elevator ride?

Bumukas yung pintuan ng elevator sa sumunod na floor nung pababa na. At ayun nga, nagsidagsaan ang tao. Siksikan! Lalo akong napasiksik sa sulok.

“Ayos ka lang ba dyan?”

Napatingin ako sa nagtanong.

At sana hindi na lang ako tumingin kase nung tumingin ako, nagtama yung mga mata namin. At lalong lumakas yung kaba na nararamdaman ko.

At lalo pang lumakas ng nginitian nya ‘ko.

Punyemas talaga.

“Ang tahimik mo pala talaga.” Sabi nya. Kumunot ang noo ko. Bakit may PALA sa sentence nya? At hindi lang yun. Sinamahan pa ng TALAGA.

At parang sumasang-ayon ako sa kanya dahil hindi ako sumagot.

“Jenny, right?”

Hindi ko alam kung pano nya nalaman ang pangalan ko. Pero naalala ko na may suot nga pala akong ID.

He held out his left hand. “Ako nga pala si Vincent.” Sabi nya ng may ngiti. Palangiti pala sya. Pwede syang model ng toothpaste. Pantay-pantay at mapuputi ang mga ngipin nya.

Inabot ko yung kamay nya. At nadoble pa yung kaba na nararamdaman ko.

“N-Nice to meet you.”

“It’s nicer to meet you. Tagal na kitang gustong makilala eh. Kaso ang tahimik mo..” Medyo namula ako sa sinabi nya. At wala na akong nai-respond sa sinabi nyang yun. Basta napatitig na lang ako sa kanya. Hindi ko alam kung gaano katagal.

Ground floor.

Kasabay ng pagbukas ng elevator ay ang paghihiwalay ng mga titig at kamay namin. Narealize ko bigla na medyo matagal din palang magkahawak yung mga kamay namin.

Sumandal ulit ako sa dingding ng elevator.

“Hindi ka ba lalabas?” Tanong nya. Umiling ako.

“Ganun ba? Sige, I’ll go ahead.” Tinanguan ko lang sya. Sumunod na sya dun sa mga taong lumalabas. At nagsimula na ring magsara yung elevator.

Pero bago pa sya nagsara ng tuluyan, may sinabi syang nakapagpakaba pa lalo sa ‘kin. Sabi nya...

“Sabay tayong mag-lunch bukas ha?”

Then the elevator door closed.

==========

Bless The Pee

PAKSHET!

Nakailang ihi na ba ako maghapon?! One, two, three, four, five—binilang talaga eh noh? Eh kase naman! Naman kase! Wala pa atang tatlong baso ng tubig ang nainom ko ngayong maghapon pero kung makaihi ako parang ang dami kong tubig na inilagay sa katawan ko.

Ano ba namang klaseng pantog meron ako at gano kaliit?!

Wait lang—CR lang ulet. Punyemas!

--

Back!

Gusto nyo ng trivia? True to life eto... yung first part lang. Haha! Katawa si Author, abnormal ang pantog! XD

Anyway, back to me. Ako na bida ng story na ‘to.

Hmmm...

Eh ano ba kaseng purpose ng istorya na ‘to? Wala naman talagang sense. Kahit ipilit wala talaga. Kase tungkol lang naman ‘to sa pag-ihi. Haha...

Anyway, eto ako ngayon, back to work...

--

Busy-busyhan ako pagtatype ng may kamay na biglang lumapat sa ibabaw ng desk ko. Natural napatigil ako sa ginagawa ko at napatingin sa kamay na yun.

Ang ganda. Malinis ang kuko, mahahaba yung mga daliri na payat tapos maputi. Napatingin ako sa may-ari ng kamay na yun. Si Dean pala, officemate ko.

“Hi Marichu!”

“Hi back. What can I do for you?”

Sa tanambuhay ko ata dito sa office, ngayon lang sya lumapit sa ‘kin. Di naman kami close eh. Nakakabatian ko lang sya saka kangitian. Yun lang. Bukod kase sa mas mataas ang posisyon nya sa ‘kin (although hindi ko sya ka-department) eh wala naman talaga kaming bagay na mapag-uusapan.

As in wala.

“Actually...” Sabi lang nya saka biglang umalis. Ano kaya yun?

I went back to typing...

Ng bigla na naman syang dumating, dala-dala ang maraming folders na may lamang mga papel. Kung susumahin mo yung height nung hawak nya, mga kalahating ruler. Nagsalubong agad ang mga kilay ko. ‘Wag nyang sabihing may ipapagawa nga sya? At lalong ‘wag nyang sasabihin na ganun karami!

He smiled saka ipinatong yun lahat sa mesa ko. Malakas pa nga yung pagkakabagsak

nya eh.

“Deadline na kase nito bukas eh. I just need you to check these then put some notes on each. Bigay mo sa ‘kin mamaya pagkatapos mo ha?”

Then he went back to his station.

PUNYEMAS!

Nakipagtitigan pa ‘ko ng matagal dun sa mga papel bago ko sya naisipang simulang gawin. Tinigil ko na yung ginagawa ko kase wala namang sense. Pero kahit na di ba? Pagkatapos ko nito, hihingi ako ng raise sa sweldo ko! Abah... abuso eh!

--

5:30 pm.

Supposedly, uuwi na ako. Pero dahil sa madami pa akong ginagawa at wala pang kalahati ang natatapos ko, nag-decide akong mag-OT. Ayos na rin siguro. Mga one hour na lang...

--

7:00 pm.

Taeh! Kalahati pa lang! Arrrgh!! Ayoko na! Pero no choice ako. Tinanggap ko eh. Pwede namang tanggihan kaso hindi ko naisip tumanggi kanina. Ayan tuloy... nabaon pa ‘ko sa trabaho.

TT_TT

--

Sometime before 8:00...

“Oy Marichu, dinalhan kita ng pagkain. Hindi ka pa ata naghahapunan eh. Here... don’t worry libre na yan.” Dean said, saka nag-smile at umalis.

At dahil sa ako’y gutom na, nilantakan ko na yung mga pagkaing nilagay nya sa mesa ko, namely: thin crust pizza from Shakey’s, lasagna from Greenwich at spaghetti sa Jollibee. Aba... talagang alam nya ang mga paborito ko ah? Siguro inalam nya talaga kase wala syang balak magbayad sa ‘kin ng cash. -_-

Pero ayos na rin ‘to.

Kain much muna.

--

10:00 pm.

Still have some work to do. Waaaah! I’m so worrying about my welfare right now! Hindi pa naman ako sanay umuwi ng gabing-gabi! At nagpaalam na sa ‘kin yung huling empleyado na kasama kong mag-OT!

Waaaah ulit! May nagmumulto pa naman daw sa building namin!

TT_TT

Kaya naman the next hour, hinapit ko na talaga ang pagchi-check nung mga files na binigay nya. Nung matapos ko na (finally!), nilapag ko sya sa desk ni Dean.

Wala na sya. Ang hinayupak, pagkapasa sa ‘kin ng trabaho nya, iniwanan pa ‘ko!

Mag-isa akong lumabas ng office. Salamat na lang at may guard!

“Bye kuya guard!” Paalam ko sa kanya. Kung di nga lang nakakahiya, magpapahatid pa ‘ko kahit hanggang sa sakayan lang eh. Kaso alangan namang iwanan nya yung pwesto nya di ba?

gulp

Mag-isa akong sumakay ng elevator.

Pagkababa ko, dumerecho na ‘ko agad dun sa sakayan ng fx. Dumadaan sila dun talaga... hindi ko lang alam kung meron pa ng nagitong oras. Almost 12 na...

“Buti na lang naabutan kita.”

Nagulat ako ng may magsalita. Paglingon ko, si Dean, humihingal pa. Syempre nagtaka ako, akala ko kase nakauwi na sya.

“Nag-CR lang ako sandali, nawala ka na sa pwesto mo. Tapos mo na pala yung pinapagawa ko...”

“Hindi ka pa umuuwi?”

“Syempre hindi. Sino na lang ang maghahatid sa ‘yo ‘pag umuwi ako?”

Then he smiled.

Hindi ko na napigilan ang sarili ko. Hinampas ko sya ng pagkalakas-lakas sa braso.

“Aray!”

“Punyemas ka! Hindi ka pa naman pala umuuwi eh bat hindi mo man lang ako tinulungan?!”

“Eee sorry. Nakakatamad kaseng gawin yun eh...”

“At talagang aminado kang tinatamad ka lang!” Tatanggapin ko pa sana kung lubog sya sa trabaho eh. Pero yung... TINATAMAD LANG sya?! Walanjo! Sana pala hindi ko na tinulungan!

“Sorry na... babayaran ko na lang yung effort mo...”

“Aba dapat lang!”

“Halika na. Ihahatid na kita.”

“Sige. May kotse ka?”

“Hindi ko dala eh. Coding kase ngayon.”

So nag-commute kami.

Kinabukasan... at sa mga sumunod pang araw, tinupad nga ni Dean yung sabi nyang babayaran nya yung efforts ko. Araw-araw nya ‘kong hinahatid sundo. Araw-araw libre ng lunch at minsan dinner. May tawad pang flowers at chocolates minsan.

Akalain mo yun, nauwi sa panliligaw? Hehe...

Bago ko sya sagutin, meron syang ikinwento sa ‘kin. Alala nyo yung araw na nakailang ihi ako?

Nung araw na yun, binibilang pala ni Dean kung nakailang balik ako sa CR. Mantakin mo yun, naka-trenta daw ako?!

Halos every thirty minutes daw kase pabalik balik ako sa CR.

Binilang nya daw yun kung ilan. Sabi nya sa sarili nya, kapag nakaabot ako ng 30 na pasok sa CR... liligawan nya ‘ko. Sign kung baga.

Kaya pala nilapitan nya ‘ko nung araw na yun. Kaso bigla daw syang natorpe... kaya bumalik na lang daw sya sa pwesto nya. Pero napag-isip-isip nya na mukha syang tanga nung ginawa nya yun kaya binalak nyang bumalik sa pwesto ko. Kaso wala syang maisip na magandang dahilan kung bakit sya babalik.

Tapos nakita nya yung stack of papers na last month pa pala at no need to check na! Kahimang yun... di ko man lang napansin yung date..

Anyway, pinagawa nya nga sa ‘kin yun and he waited for me the whole night kase nakukonsensya daw sya. Eh hindi naman nya mabawi yung pinapagawa nya kase baka daw magalit ako sa kanya at hindi ko na sya kausapin.

So ibig sabihin patong patong na kasinungalingan ang ginawa nya dahil lang sa natotorpe sya.

Pero imbes na magalit, natuwa pa ako sa ginawa nya. Haha... Ang cute kase. Kaya ayun, sinagot ko na sya at naging kami na.

Bow.

P.S. Pinahirapan ko din sya ng maraming beses. Ganti lang. ;)

==========

Promise Ring

Sorry for the typos and grammatical errors.

--

“Wake up...come on! Wake up!” Sinampal-sampal nya ito pero wala pa rin. She resisted giving him mouth to mouth. There’s no way..

“Isa! ‘Pag di ka gumising..iiwan kita!”

Biglang nagmulat ng mata si Eron. “Matapos mo ‘kong itulak sa pool, may gana ka pang mang-threaten jan.” Bumangon ito. Brielle rolled her eyes. “I knew you were acting.”

He snickered. “I was hoping you would give me a kiss.”

“Keep on dreaming. Malay mo, magkatotoo one day.”

Tumingin ito sa kanya. “You’re such a tease Bree.”

Tumayo sya at umalis, leaving him on the poolside. Swimming ng klase nila. Christmas party extension. Lahat nag-iinuman sa loob, maliban sa kanilang dalawa. Niyaya sya nitong maglangoy at ng tumanggi sya ay hinila sya nito sa pool. Sa inis nya ay sinipa nya ito ng malakas. He pretended to be drowning and she intended to give him CPR! Lucky for her, she had a sense to slap him first. Unggoy na yun, uutakan pa sya!

“Bi! Tagay!” Alok sa kanya ng mga classmates nya.

“Sige ba!” Hindi sya mag-iinom but occasionally, napapatagay. At pag napapatagay, nalalasing. Not all the time but most of it.

Binigay sa kanya ang baso na hanggang kalahati ang laman. Iinumin na sana nya ng pigilin sya ni Eron. “Guys, bawasan nyo naman. Hindi tubig yan.”

“Asus! KJ!” Sabi nya. “If you don’t want me to drink it, you drink it.” Hamon nya. Alam nyang hindi ito umiinom. May pagka-santo ata ito. Walang bisyo.

“Fine” Sabi nito na ikinagulat nya. “Pero pag ininom ko yan, wag ka ng iinom.”

“Call” Sabi nya.

Kinuha nito ang baso sa kanya at tinungga ng straight ang pinaghalo-halong alak. Pagkakainom nito ay bigla itong tumakbo sa CR at sumuka. Napangiwi sya.

Sinundan ni Brielle si Eron. Nakatungo ito sa toilet bowl at iniaalay lahat ng kinain dito.

“Ayan..kase naman eh.” Paunang sermon nya. “Ang alak hindi tubig. Kung di ka ba naman sira..tinungga tungga mo pa.”

Tumingin ito sa kanya, nakangiwi. “Ano ba kaseng alak yun?”

She shrugged. “Halo-halo. GSM, the bar, red horse..Tas tinunaw na mentos.” Dagdag nya ng nakangiti.

“At balak mong uminom nyan?!”

Brielle shrugged. “Mahina pa yan kumpara sa iniinom ni tatay.”

“Nga pala,” He stood up. “Binubugbog ka pa rin ba ng tatay mo?”

Umiling sya. “Baka mamaya..” Tumakas lang kase sya. Alam nyang lasing ito pag uwi. At pag nalasing ito ay sya ang napag-iinitan. “O kaya bukas..pag tulog na sya pagdating ko mamaya.”

“Ihatid kaya kita.”

Umiling sya ulit. “Wag na. Baka madamay ka pa...”

Si Brielle ang nag-iisang anak na babae ni Mang Nelson. Meron syang dalawang kuya. Si Andrew—ang panganay—ay nagtatrabaho sa malayong lugar. Si Eric naman, ang sinundan nya, ay naglayas. Nasa kapitbahay lang naman ito kaya lang kahit anong pakiusap nya, hindi ito umuuwi.

Namatay ang mama nya 7 years ago. Noon, matino pa ang papa nya. Actually—para itong santo. Walang bisyo. Pero sa sobrang pagmamahal nito sa mama nya, hindi nito nakayanan ang pagkamatay nito. Natutong uminom at 7 years later, nothing has changed.

Kagaya nga ng hinala nya, nabugbug na naman sya ng papa nya pagkauwi. At ngayon, halata pa rin ang mga pasa nya sa braso. Tinamad na syang pumasok. Bukas na lang..

Kinabukasan..

“O, ano’ng nangyari sa’yo?” Tanong sa kanya ng nakakunot-noong si Eron.

“Wala, nahulog sa hagdan.”

He crossed his arms. “Wala kaya kayong hagdan.”

Napatawa sya. “Alam mo naman pala eh. Linggo-linggo mo na lang ba ‘kong tatanungin?”

Eron sighed. “Here..” Inabot nito sa kanya ang mga notebooks nito.

“Ano’ng gagawin ko dyan?”

“Assignments. Kopya na.”

She smiled. Kahit noon pa, pag absent sya, lagi syang pinapakopya ni Eron ng assignments kinabukasan. Kinuha nya ang mga notebooks nito. “Thanks. You really are a life saver.”

“You owe me lunch. Again.”

She opened her mouth to complain. But at that moment, this guy came walking by. Si Clarence, ang bad boy ng school. Antipatiko, suplado at ma-chicks. Ang ultimate crush nya.

“Hi Clarence!” She greeted him. Tiningnan lang sya nito pati si Eron at saka nagpatuloy sa paglalakad. She glared at Eron. “Kasalanan mo to weh!”

“Ano na namang ginawa ko?”

“Hindi tuloy ako malapitan ni Clarence! Lagi ka kaseng nakadikit sa ‘kin eh!”

Eron rolled his eyes. “Hanggang ngayon ba naman nag-iilusyon ka pa rin?”

“Ang sama mo.” She said, saddened by the truth na nag-iilusyon lang talaga sya. Inakbayan sya ni Eron. “Ganyan talaga. Minsan hindi ka mamahalin ng taong mahal mo.”

Natawa sya sa sinabi nito. “Ang OA mo ah. Crush ko lang yun no.”

He smiled. “O sya. Tara na ng makakopya ka pa ng assignments mo.”

Every one stared at her as she entered the classroom.

“Bi! Ano’ng nangyari sa’yo?” Tanong sa kanya ni Mikaela.

She shrugged. “Nadapa tas napatama yung braso ko sa lamesa. Kaya eto..” She lied, as she always does. Sa buong klase, si Eron lang ang may alam ng tungkol sa pamilya nya. Hindi nito maintindihan kong bakit pinagtatakpan nya ang papa nya. Mikaela didn’t seem to know what’s really happening with her. She readily believed her.

The class fell quiet as the teacher enters the room. “Attendance.” The teacher called out names.

“Brielle Erany Lopez?” Brielle raised her hand. “Glad you can join the class today Miss Lopez.” Mrs De Mayo commented. She just smiled. Sanay na sya sa comment ng mga teachers. She’s hardly ever present.

It was nearly Valentine’s Day. That means na huling JS Prom na nila. Hindi sya umattend last year and she doubt that she could attend this one. Her father won’t lend her money to buy a decent dress.

“Hoy!” Eron snapped, forcing her back to reality.

“Ano?!” Kunot-noo nyang tanong.

“Lumilipad na naman yang utak mo.”

She sighed. “Nag-iisip lang ako ng magandang palusot kay ma’am.”

“Para san naman?”

“Sa JS..”

“Hindi ka na naman aattend? Wala na naman akong partner nyan eh.” Naghihimutok na sabi ni Eron. Last year kase sila dapat ang magkapartner sa sayaw kase ito lang ang mas matangkad na lalake sa kanya sa klase nila. Pwede sana si Clarence kaso hindi naman nya ito kaklase. She bailed out the night before the prom. Nagtampo ito ng todo sa kanya noon..at ngayon..mauulit pa ata..”Sige ganyan ka naman, parang hindi ka kaibigan..” Dagdag pa nito.

“O sya sige. ‘Pag nakakita ako ng damit, aattend na ‘ko.” Napipilitan nyang sabi.

His face lightened up. “Talaga?”

“Oo nga. Kulit.”

“O, bakit ang sama ng mukha mo?” Tanong sa kanya ng classmate nya, si Mikaela.

“Nakapangako kase ako kay Eron eh. Aattend sana ako ng JS kaso..nagmakaawa na ‘ko’t lahat kay tatay—sabi ko kahit 500 lang pautangin nya ‘ko—ayaw eh. Namura pa ‘ko. Tapos si Kuya Andrew naman, wala pa daw sweldo. Hayy.....”

“Ahm Bi—gusto mo, sa ‘yo na lang yung isa kong damit. Nadoble kase yung order ni mama eh. Isa lang naman ang kailangan ko so..”

Mikaela is a very rich kid. Solong anak ng presidente ng isang microfinance company. And it’s not very unlikely for her to own several dresses. In fact, lagi nga ata itong naka-dress. Conservative at tahimik ito. Nagtataka rin sya kung bakit sila naging magkaibigan. They were like the yin and yang—her being the bad.

“Wag na. Nakakahiya naman sa ‘yo.” Alam nyang hindi coincidence na nadoble ang order ng mama ni Mikaela. For all she know, sinadya nito iyon para may maibigay sa kanya. She doesn’t want to take advantage of her.

“Bi, kapag hindi ka nakaattend, magagalit sa’yo si Eron. Gusto mo ba yun?”

“Napakaarte naman kase ng lalaking yun eh.”

Mikaela chuckled. “Ang swerte swerte mo nga eh. Kahit maraming may gusto sa kanya, he still chooses to be with you. Alam mo bang ang dami ng galit sa’yo? They all thought you guys were together.”

“Haha. Fat chance. Gusto ko, bad boy. Yung may kulay ang buhok, suplado, playboy, antipatiko, aloof. A social outcast.” Like Clarence.. Who at that moment chooses to

pass by. “Hi Clarence!” She greeted him with a smile.

“Hi.” He responded. Gusto nyang magtatalon sa tuwa. This would be the first time na inimikan sya nito. It was like a miracle!

The next day came as a bit of a shock. Naiiling-iling sya ng makitang may kulay na ang buhok ni Eron.

“What have you done to your hair?!”

Napahipo ito sa ulo. “Napag-tripan ng pinsan ko. ‘Wag ko daw munang pakialaman kase hindi pa pwedeng kulayan ulit.”

“Bagay sa’yo.” Sabi nya.

He looked at her like she just said ‘I love you’. “Talaga? Nagustuhan mo?”

She nodded. “Pero mas bagay kay Clarence yang ganyan.”

“Ouch.”

“Don’t worry. Gwapo ka pa din naman.” Bawi nya.

Ngumiti ito. “Ayan naman eh..”

“Pero mas gwapo si Clarence.”

Sumama ang mukha nito. “Sige, ganyan ka naman.”

She laughed.

The rest of January was allotted for practice. And every time na hindi nya kasama si Eron, pinapansin sya ni Clarence. That’s why she always makes an effort to stay away from him. Napansin agad ito ni Eron. While they were ‘dancing’, he confronted her. “Iniiwasan mo ba ‘ko?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

“Hindi naman sa ganun. Napansin ko lang kase na pinapansin ako ni Clarence ‘pag hindi kita kasama. Kaya si Mikaela na lang ang sinasamahan ko. Mas swerte sya sa ‘yo eh.” Pagdadahilan nya.

“Natural. Pano ka hindi papansinin nun, eh may gusto yun kay Mikaela.”

Bigla syang tumigil sa pagsayaw. “Pano mo nasabi?”

“Hindi mo ba napapansin?” he asked. “Hindi ka man lang nagtaka na sa tuwing magkasama kayo ni Mikaela eh saka ka lang pinapansin ni Clarence?”

She thought about those times. Tama nga si Eron. Her ultimate crush has a crush on her friend. How ironic. She likes a bad boy and the bad boy likes a good girl. It’s like the devil fell in love with the angel.

“S-siguro naman nagkataon lang..”

“I also saw him kahapon, inantay nyang matapos maglinis ng classroom si Mikaela tapos umuwi na din sya.”

“O eh ba’t ‘di nya inihatid?”

Eron shrugged. “Pano nya ihahatid eh may sundo?”

Napansin ng teacher na hindi na sila sumasayaw at sinita sila. They kept quiet for the rest of the practice hours.

“Mika..can I ask you something?”

Mikaela closed her book. “Sure. Ano?”

“Sino’ng crush mo?” Brielle blurted out. She saw Mikaela blush. “W-wala..” Sabi nito.

“Ano ka abnormal? C’mon, hindi ko naman ipagsasabi eh.” Pamimilit nya.

“W-wala nga. Stop asking weird questions Bi.” Tumayo ito at lumabas ng classroom. Brielle sighed.

The following day, she saw Clarence—with his black hair. His earrings are gone and so are the rubber shoes. For the first time, he looked decent. Hinila nya agad si Eron sa tabi. “Nagkapalit ba kayo ng kaluluwa ni Clarence?” Tanong nya dito.

Natawa si Eron. “Ano ba namang klaseng tanong yan?”

Hinawakan nya ang buhok nito. “Clarence dyed his hair black. And you dyed yours brown.”

“Maybe he thought Mikaela likes good guys.”

“I hope he’s wrong.”

The change in Clarence became so evident that the teachers noticed it too. Everyone seemed to be talking about it. And Eron changed too. Aside from dying his hair, he also had earrings. “Ano ba talagang drama ‘to ha?” Minsang tanong nya dito.

“Bakit? Si Clarence lang ba ang may karapatang maghikaw at magkulay ng buhok?”

She glared at him. “This is way out of your personality Eron. Ano ba’ng problema mo?”

“Wala.” He said and left her without another word.

JS Prom Day.

Since walang nanay o kapatid na babae, Brielle didn’t know a thing about make-up. Kaya hinayaan nya na lang na nakalugay ang kulot nyang buhok at saka pinasadahan ng lip gloss ang labi nya. She looked in the mirror and got disappointed. She still looks the same—well, minus the bruises.

There came a knock at the door. She was sure it was her father. Sila lang naman dalawa sa bahay eh.

“Anak..” He called as he slightly opened the door.

Nilingon nya ito. Himala, hindi lasing. “Papa?”

Her father smiled. “You look beautiful, just like—your mother.”

She was touched. “Salamat po.”

“Pwede ba’ng pumasok?”

“Oo naman po..”

Pumasok si Mang Nelson at umupo sa gilid ng kama nya. Then he motioned her to sit beside him. Sumunod naman sya agad, wondering what he wants. Dumukot si Mang Nelson sa bulsa nito and out came a necklace. “Eto. Pamana ng mama mo.”

Her heart swelled. Ang necklace kaseng iyon ang isang pag-aari ng mama nya na hindi maiwan-iwanan ng papa nya. Wherever he go, the necklace goes with him. “P-pero papa--”

“It’s about time I let this go, hija. I have to let her go.” Sabi ni Mang Nelson na nagsisimula ng maluha. Napapaiyak na rin sya. She hugged her father with all the love she have for him. “I love you papa..”

“I love you too anak. Pangako, magbabago na si papa..”

Nagpahid sya ng luha at tumingin dito. “Talaga papa?”

Tumango si Mang Nelson. “And did I mention that you are beautiful?”

“Kakasabi nyo lang po.” Nakangiti nyang sabi. There came a knock downstairs. “Si Eron..”

“Boyfriend mo?” Tanong ng papa nya. Umiling sya. “Bestfriend po.”

“O sya, bumaba na tayo at baka ma-late pa kayo.”

Seeing her come downstairs was one of the most breathtaking experiences of his life. He had never seen her in a dress before. Hindi na namalayang kanina pa pala sya nakatulala. Tinapik lang sya nito kaya sya natauhan.

“You look beautiful..” Hindi nya napigilang sabi.

She blushed. “Thanks.”

“Sa wakas nagmukha ka ring tao.” Biro nya. Pinandilatan nya ito. Tumikhim si Mang Nelson na kanina pa pala nakatayo sa tabi ni Brielle.

“Good evening po.” So this is Mang Nelson, he thought. He clenched his fist, remembering the horrible things he did to Brielle. The first time he met the man, he just wants to punch him in the face.

“Papa, this is Eron. Eron, this is my papa.” Pakilala ni Brielle sa dalawa.

“Nice to meet you sir.” Napipilitan nyang sabi.

“Same here, hijo. Ingatan mo ang anak ko ha.”

He just nodded and motioned Brielle to go.

Pagkalabas ng pinto ay huminga ng malalim si Eron. Brielle looked at him. “O bakit ka bumubuntong-hininga dyan?”

“Kung makangiti ka kanina, parang hindi ka nya binubugbog ah.”

“You know I love my father..” Dahilan nito sa kanya.

“How can you love that man?!” Naririndi nyang tanong. “He was irresponsible. A drunkard. Mabigat ang kamay. H—“ SLAP.

“Don’t ever say such things about my father again!”

He went grim. “I’m sorry.”

“Umalis na nga tayo bago pa magbago ang isip ko.”

They didn’t talk for the rest of the night. Ng matapos ang program and it was time for the dance, Eron hurried to Brielle. “May I have this dance?” When she didn’t answer, he said, “You promised that I would be your first dance...”

He heard her sigh. Then she took his hand and let him lead her to the dance floor. The music was slow and they were both swaying awkwardly to it.

“Ouch!” Biglang sigaw nya. She literally stomped on his foot.

“You deserve it.” She muttered.

“Sorry na nga eh!” Sabi nya ng nakangiwi.

“Sorry doesn’t cut it.”

“What, you want me to beg? Luluhod pa ba ‘ko?”

She glared at him. “Sinabi ko ba?”

He sighed. “Look, I was way out of line kanina. Concerned lang naman ako sa ‘yo eh.”

She sighed too. “Fine.”

Ngumiti sya. “Bati na tayo?”

“Hindi pa. Si Clarence dapat ang first dance ko eh, sumingit ka na naman.” Naiinis nitong sabi.

“Bakit? Sigurado ka ba’ng gusto ka nyang isayaw?”

Inirapan sya nito. “Alam mo ikaw, panira ka ng pangarap.”

“Nagsasabi lang ako ng totoo. Masyado ka kaseng malayo kung tumingin eh. Malay mo naman, nasa tabi-tabi lang yung taong para sa’yo. Lagpasan ka lang kung tumingin.”

“Nagpaparamdam ka ba?” Natatawang tanong nito sa kanya. Binatukan nya ito. “Sinabi ko bang ako?”

They dance to several songs ng makaramdam na sila ng pagod. Naupo muna sila at pinapanuod ang iba habang nagsasayaw. After a few more songs, the DJ announced that it was down to the final song. Sumimangot si Brielle. “Last song na, hindi pa rin nya ako isinasayaw.” Now she realized na si Mikaela nga ang gusto nito. Halos lahat ata ng slow dance ay ito ang magkapartner. Clarence never lets her go.

“Tara, sayaw tayo.” Aya sa kanya ni Eron.

“Ikaw na naman?!”

“C’mon..” Hinila sya nito. He practically dragged her all the way to the center. At itinabi pa kina Clarence. Hay buhay...

“Pre, palit muna.” Maya-maya’y sabi nito kay Clarence. She couldn’t believe her ears. She finally got to dance with Clarence! Clarence, of course, hesitantly agrees. Okay lang, pwede na syang grumaduate dahil naisayaw na sya nito.

“Lagi mo na lang syang pinagbibigyan.” Puna ni Mikaela sa kanya. He sighed. “Hayaan mo na. Dun sya masaya eh.”

“Alam mo kung ganyan ka ng ganyan, walang mangyayari sa inyong dalawa...”

He looked at Mikaela. “Buti ka pa, napapansin mo.”

“Crush kaya kita dati kaya palagi ako sa ‘yong nakatingin. Ikaw naman, laging sa kanya lang nakatingin.” She admitted, blushing.

“Dati? Ibig bang sabihin—“

“Shhh.” Saway nito sa kanya. ”’Wag kang maingay.”

Eron chuckled. “I just wish she’s not that dense.” He said, looking at Brielle.

“Ikaw naman kase..alam mo, ang mga babae parang pulis yan. You can hand her all the evidence, but she won’t believe you until you confess.”

“Baka kase..if I confess to her, she might reject me. I don’t want to lose our friendship. It’s the only thing that keeps us close. I’d rather be her friend than her nobody.”

She patted his shoulder. “She’s so lucky to have you.”

“Thanks.” He said with a smile.

The weekend came like breeze. Monday na ulit, and for the first time in her life, she had no bruises to hide. After the prom, abala naman ang lahat para sa final exams, graduation at foundation day. Palaging hindi mahagilap si Eron dahil abala ito sa pag-aasikaso ng activities ng school. He seemed to have forgotten that it’s her birthday tomorrow. Umub-ob sya at nagpilit matulog kahit kakapasok pa lang nya sa klase.

“Hoy!” She nearly jumped off the seat. So Eron finally showed up.

“Wag ka ngang nanggugulat! Aatakihin ako sa puso sa’yo eh!”

He grinned. “Sorry. May naalala lang kase ako.”

“Ano naman?” She asked, pretending to not know why.

“Di ba may practice tayo bukas ng whole day?” Tanong nito.

She pouted. Akala naman nya,,

“So, ano’ng gusto mong regalo bukas?”

Her face brightened. “Akala ko nakalimutan mo na.”

“Ako pa.”

“Gusto ko ng kiss.” Sabi nya rito.

He chuckled. “Yun lang? Gusto mo ngayon na eh.” Ngumuso ito at aktong hahalik sa kanya.

“Sira! Hindi yan. Yung chocolate.”

“Ah..liliwanagin mo kase....”

Kinabukasan ay inantabayanan sya nito sa gate pa lang ng campus. “Happy birthday!!!” Masayang bati nito. She grinned. Naka-isandaang bati na ata ito sa kanya mula kaninang madaling araw. She lend out her hand. “Gift ko?”

He handed her a kiss. As in isa lang talaga. Isang piraso ng Hershey.

“Ano to?” She asked, frowning.

“Sabi mo kiss.” Pagdadahilan nito.

“Pampam. Penge pa.”

He kissed her on the cheek. Napahawak sya sa pisngi nya. “Hoy!” Sigaw nya rito. He just grinned. “Sabi mo penge.”

“Yung chocolate! Napakapilosopo mo naman eh!”

Tumawa ito. “Liliwanagin mo kase.”

Inirapan nya ito at saka naglakad palayo.

“Score!” Eron whispered to himself. Binuksan nya ang bag nya at hinugot ang isang malaking plastic ng Hershey’s kisses and handed it to her. “O ayan. Pakasawa ka hanggang sa mabulok ang ipin mo.”

“Yey!” She squeaked. “I love you talaga best friend!”

He smiled. Can you just drop the best friend part?, himutok ng puso nya.

Uwian na ng hapon. As usual, Mikaela was left with her group to clean the classroom.

“Andyan na naman sa may pinto si Clarence!” Kinikilig na announcement ni Mimay. It was evident to all her classmates na nililigawan sya ni Clarence. “Ang swerte mo naman Mika!”

She just smiled. It was so hard to concentrate on cleaning when he’s around. Kinuha ni Mimay ang walis sa kamay nya. “Ako na dito. Umuwi ka na’t baka mainip pa yang prince charming mo.”

She sighed. Eh hinihintay lang naman sya nitong matapos tapos uuwi na rin ito. And she was right. When he saw her get out of the room, tumalikod na ito at aktong aalis. “Clarence!”

He turned around at nilaro ang buhok, messing it up in the process. “San ka pupunta?” Tanong nya rito.

“Ahm..uuwi na.”

“Pwede bang ihatid mo ‘ko ngayon? Gusto ko kaseng maglakad.”

He smirked. Unlike any other guy in the school, Clarence preferred to smirk rather than smile. Girls find it kinda sexy. Girls including her—who just started palpitating at that very moment. “Sure.” Sabi nito.

“Bakit bigla kang nagbago?” Tanong ni Mikaela kay Clarence.

“Panong nagbago?” he asked innocently.

She smiled. “Tumino ka kase..”

He looked at her, confused. “Ayaw mo ba?”

Umiling sya at ginulo ang buhok nito. “Mas gusto ko yung dating ikaw. You don’t have to change for me Clarence. I liked you the way you were.”

At these words, Clarence’s insides fluttered. “Talaga? Gusto mo ‘ko?”

“Oo. Ang hirap pigilin eh.” Pag-amin nya.

He grinned and somehow Mikaela held her breath. He even looked cuter when he grinned. “So, tayo na?” Tanong nito. She blushed and just nodded, unable to muster the words.

Both Mikaela and Clarence were inseparable for the next few days. Their happiness, however, was short-lived. Ng malaman ng papa ni Mikaela na boyfriend na nya si Clarence ay nagalit ito. He threatened to take her abroad if she doesn’t break up with Clarence. Alam kase ng papa nya ang reputasyon nito since elementary. Noon pa man ay ayaw na talaga ng papa nya rito.

She had no choice but to stay away from Clarence. The latter was very much hurt but both can’t do anything. She didn’t tell Clarence about the situation. She just let him assume things. It’s best for him to hate her so that being apart won’t be much harder for him.

Foundation Day.

Nagulat na lang si Brielle when somebody cuffed her hand. Alam nyang sa marriage booth yun. Taon-taon may ganon sa school nila eh. Sanay na syang makakita ng mga umiirit na biktima ng social prank na yun. But never did she imagine na makakaranas din sya noon. She looked up to see her captor. It was Eron. He was smiling like he won a lottery. “Anong kalokohan naman ba ‘to ha?” Naiinis na tanong nya rito. Kinakantsawan na sila ng mga nakakakita. She blushed furiously while he dragged her away to the marriage booth.

Alfie, their class president was the ‘priest’ for the day. “Wala bang tutol?” Tanong nito sa mga nanunuod.

“Wala! Wala!”

“Ang tumutol, hindi makakalabas sa school ng buhay!” Kantsaw ng iba. Napatawa si Eron which diverted her attention to him.

“Walang nakakatawa!” She said in anger.

Sumeryoso ito. “Brielle Erany Lopez. Nakakarami ka na ah. Matagal na kitang pinagbibigyan. Hinayaan na kitang magpaligaw pero wala namang nagtatagal. Sawang-sawa na ‘kong makita kang inaagaw sa ‘kin ng iba. Ayoko na.”

Nagsigawan ang mga nakakanuod. Tumingin sya dito, searching for a sign that he was kidding. She found none.

“Ay ano ba! Gusto nyo pa bang makasal? Marami pang nakahanay eh!” Reklamo ni Alfie.

Sinenyasan ito ni Eron na magpatuloy. Tumingin si Alfie dito. “Ikaw Eron, tinatanggap mo ba—“

“Oo. Kaya ko nga kinaladkad dito eh.”

Alfie shrugged and turned to her. “Ikaw Bi, tinatanggap mo ba itong si Eron na kinaladkad ka pa mula main building hanggang dito mapakasalan ka lang?”

She was about to say no when Eron spoke. “Pag umangal ka, hahalikan kita. Sige.” She grimaced.

“Oo na!” Naiinis nyang sabi.

Eron reached for his pocket at kinuha ang dalawang singsing na yari sa manipis na kawad. “I promise to replace this when we get married for real.” With these words, the crowd burst into applause. Those were the words she’ll never forget for the rest of her life—or for ten years, for that matter.

TEN YEARS LATER. Everything has changed. Tanda pa nya noon, after graduation, lumipad na patungong Canada ang pamilya ni Eron. He became a celebrated software engineer. Madalas din itong ma-link sa kung kani-kaninong sikat na babae kaya naman iniisiip nya kung tutuparin pa din ba nito ang pangako nito sa kanya. She on the other hand, became a wedding planner. Maraming nag-uudyok sa kanyang mag-model dahil sa tangkad nya pero she turned them all down. She wanted a quiet life. Kagagaling lang nya sa Nunzio, Italy noon ng mabalitaan nya ang nangyari kay Mikaela. She learned that she got married to a man chosen by her father. She could tell by the pictures that she wasn’t happy. Poor girl, she thought.

Lucky for her, wala pang nakakahuli sa kanya. And though she hated to admit it, she still waits for that silly promise to come true. That’s why she was so afraid to come back to her town for the past years. What if he had gotten over her already?

“Oh my god! Bi?!”

Kunot-noo nyang nilingon ang tumawag. “Mimay?”

Tuwang-tuwa ito. “Ako nga! Kelan ka pa dumating?”

“Kahapon lang.” Sabi nya rito. At kahapon din nya nalaman na magkabati na ang kuya nya at ang papa nya. She was so happy to hear the news. Sinalubong sya ng papa nya, a new man.

“Magkasabay ba kayo ni Eron?” Tanong nito na ipinagtaka nya. “Umuwi ba sya?” Nagtataka nyag tanong. Wala na kase syang balita dito. Tumango ito.

“At alam mo bang engaged na sya?”

Aray. I shouldn’t have come home, she thought. Umiling sya. “N-no. Wala na akong balita sa kanya.”

“Sayang naman, akala ko pa naman kayo ng dalawa for life.” Sabi nito na naiiling.

She shrugged. “Sige Mimay, uuwi muna ako ah. Baka hinahanap na ‘ko ni papa. Thanks for the news.” Mimay waved at her. She walked home.

Pagdating nya sa bahay ay may nakita syang isang kotse. Not hers, by the looks of it. Nagtaka sya. Sino naman ang bibisita sa kanya? Si Mimay pa lang ang nakakita sa kanya kase kanina lang sya lumabas. Sinalubong sya ng papa nya. “Anak, may bisita ka.”

“Sino daw po?” Tanong nya.

Ngumiti ang tatay nya. “Basta. See for yourself, siguradong matutuwa ka.”

Pagpasok nya, the first one she saw is a very tall man. Naka-short ito at simpleng T-shirt, but that doesn’t change the fact that his presence is so arresting..and disturbing. He may have felt her enter the room kase bigla itong lumingon. Her jaw automatically dropped. “E-ron?”

He smiled. “Bree—“ Mabilis nitong tinawid ang maliit na space na nakapagitan sa kanila and hugged her so tight she thought she’d lose air. “I missed you.”

She felt tingles. But then she remembered that he was already engaged. Dagli syang bumitaw dito. Kumunot ang noo ni Eron. “Ano’ng problema? Didn’t you miss me?”

“W-wala. Medyo pagod pa kase ako. Sorry I can’t entertain you right now.” Dali-dali syang tumungo ng kwarto nya, not heeding his calls.

Kinabukasan, pag gising nya ay ito ang namulatan nya, nakatunghay sa kanya. Nagtakip sya ng kumot and blushed under it. “Bakit nandito ka?” She mumbled.

“Ang tagal mo kaseng gumising kaya pinuntahan na kita. Napuyat ka ata?”

Of course I was, she thought. Buong magdamag lang kaya syang nag-iisip kung iiwasan ito o ano ba.

Hinila nito ang kumot pababa, exposing her blushing face. “Did you drink again?” Kunot-noo nitong tanong.

“No.” Sinapupo nya ang mukha. “Natural lang yan.”

Umupo ito sa gilid ng kama nya. “Get dressed. Gagala tayo.”

“San naman tayo pupunta?”

“Maglilibot-libot. I missed hanging out with you.” He said with a smile.

Of course you do, she thought. With a sigh, she got up and pushed him out the door. “Out! Magbibihis lang ako.”

“Aren’t you gonna bathe?!”

She made a face. “Wag na. Ikaw lang naman ang aamoy sa ’kin.”

He shrugged. “Sabagay kahit naman maligo ka, ganun pa rin naman ang amoy mo.”

Pinandilatan nya ito at pinagsarhan ng pinto. She heard him laugh from the other side.

She did take a bath though. Iba naman kase noon. Dati, he doesn’t care how she smells or looks. But now, he’s engaged. His world doesn’t revolve around her anymore.

“San tayo pupunta?” Tanong nya dito. Kanina pa sila naglalakad.

“Hindi ko rin alam eh. San mo ba gusto?”

“Andito pa ba si Mika?”

He nodded. “Dun na lang?”

“Sige.”

Nakita nila itong nilalaro ang 3-years old na anak nito.

“Bi! Eron!” Bati nito sa kanya.

Both of them smiled.

“Buti naisipan nyong dumalaw.”

“Syempre na-miss ka namin.” Eron said.

“Bakit nga pala kayo napadalaw? Iimbitahin nyo na ba ‘ko?”

Kumunot ang noo ni Brielle. “Iimbitahin saan?”

Napakunot din ng noo si Mika. “Di ba—I assumed na..Eron’s engagement—“ Mika held her tongue. “I’m so sorry. I just thought—you guys—“

Eron smiled. She looked away. “Is this your son?” She held the child’s face. “Gwapo ah.”

Mikaela chuckled. “That’s Clarence. Renren, say hello to Tita Bi and Tito Eron.”

“Hello po.”

She looked at Mikaela. “His name is Clarence?”

Mika let out a laugh. “Malas nga lang walang ‘junior’ sa huli.”

“Mika—“

Mikaela held up her hand. “It’s okay. Tanggap ko na.”

“I’m sorry.” Was all she could say.

“There’s really nothing we can do about it. By the way Eron, who’s the lucky girl?”

Eron looked at both of them and scratched his head. “Well—“

Brielle craned her neck to listen. Yeah, who’s the lucky girl Eron? The one who made you break your promise of marrying me ten years ago.

“Her name’s Adelle. She’s kinda busy with her work right now. Kaya hindi sya nakasama pag-uwi ko.”

“When’s the wedding?” She asked.

Eron sighed. “I don’t know. Ayaw pa nyang mag-settle down. Maybe a few years from now..”

“Matagal pa. Pwede pang maagaw.” Mika whispered in her ears.

“Oy, anu yan?” Tanong ni Eron.

“Wala..” sagot ni Mika. “Ang tagal naman ata. So, when will we meet her?”

“Maybe next month. She’s promised to meet my family and—“ He looked at Brielle. “My best friend.”

“Mommy—I need to poo poo na.” Tawag ng anak ni Mika.

“Call yaya baby.” Sabi nito. Umiling ang bata. “I want mommy. Please....” Mika smiled and gave them an apologetic look. “Pasensya na kayo ah.”

“It’s okay. Babalik na lang kami minsan.” Brielle promised.

“Adelle huh. San mo naman nakilala yan?” Tanong nya kay Eron habang naglalakad sila pauwi.

“I met her through a mutual friend. We hit it off right away. The next thing I knew, I was kneeling in front of her, proposing.” He smiled at the thought.

“Maganda?”

He turned to look at her. “Sobra..”

“Mas maganda sa’kin?”

He smiled. “Pinapahirapan mo naman ako sa mga tanong mo.”

She smirked and tucked the stray strands of hair behind her ear. Nakalimutan nyang suot pa rin nya ang singsing na bigay nito ten years ago. “You still have that?!” He asked, surprised.

She instantly hid her hand. With the sly movement, she slid the ring off her finger. “What?”

Kinuha nito ang kamay nya at hinanap ang singsing. “That ring I gave you.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“C’mon Bree. Itatago mo pa eh nakita ko na.”

She looked away. “Don’t call me that.”

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“Wala. Sige na, umuwi ka na. May pupuntahan pa ‘ko.”

“Sasamahan na kita.” Pagpiprisinta nito. Umiling sya. And then she went off.

Adelle arrived way too soon than expected. Brielle haven’t had the time to compose herself when another hit came smacking her on the head. She was beautiful alright—way too beautiful. She has soft, curly brown hair and doe eyes and a soft face. Hanggang balikat lang ito ni Eron. She dressed in style and sophistication that would make stylists run for their money. And she was very successful. A walking threat.

“Hi! You must be Brielle!” Nakangiting bati nito sa kanya ng magkita sila.

She forced a smile. “And you must be the fiancee.”

“Eron talks about you nonstop. I’m glad to finally meet his bestfriend.” “Sabi nito na may diin ang mga huling katagang binitiwan.

As if on cue, Eron came to Adelle’s side and kissed her, full on the lips. Brielle looked away. “Natutuwa naman ako at mukhang nagkakasundo kayo.” Sabi nito.

“Your bestfriend is very beautiful.” Adelle commented. Feeling as if she needed to return the favor, she said “So is your fiancee.”

Adelle pouted. “I might not make her the maid-of-honor, baka matalbugan nya ‘ko on my own wedding.” Eron smiled. “We’ll make her dress down then.”

Right, could I wear black instead?

“Could you be the wedding-planner Bree? Regalo mo na para libre?” Nasa kwarto nya ni Eron. Adelle was with his mother.

She raised her brow. “If I will plan your wedding then I won’t be your maid-of-honor.”

“That’s not fair.”

“What’s not fair is you breaking your promise.” She muttered.

“What?” Tanong nito.

“I said mahal ang talent fee for both roles.”

Sumimangot ito. “Minsan lang ako ikakasal. I want it to be perfect, and it won’t be perfect without you, you know that.”

“Don’t worry. When it’s my wedding, you won’t be obliged to be the best man.” She said with a bitter tone. It may have registered in Eron’s ears because he said “Bakit ba nagkakaganyan ka?”

“Wala.”

“I don’t believe you. Is it that time of the month?” He asked with a smile. She glared at him. “Ewan ko sa ‘yo.” She walked away.

She did agree to be the wedding planner though. But she insisted on not being the bridesmaid. Planning Eron’s wedding had been so difficult so far. Lalo na ‘pag si Adelle ang kausap nya.

“I want every thing to be red. The flowers, the mantles..kase di ba romantic ‘pag red? Actually, gusto ko red din yung gown ko. I mean, white is so off-putting. Masyadong boring. And besides, white is for virgins.” Tumawa ito. Apparently, she had lost it a long time ago, probably with Eron. She gripped her journal at that thought. Dirty bastard!

Tumingin ito sa kanya. “Is there a problem? Your face is red.”

She sighed. Her face is a dead giveaway. “Wala. Mainit lang dito.”

Adelle shrugged. “Anyway, gusto ko Vegas theme ha. Cocktail parties, bar style, casino, burlesque...stuffs like that.”

“Actually, gusto ni Eron yung mas subtle. No hard drinking—“

“I’m sure he’ll change his mind. He loves me.”

After a few weeks, Adelle left for Paris, she’s a professional model by the way. Eron was left to savor his last moments of bachelorhood. Pagbalik kase ni Adelle ay magpapakasal na sila. She insisted na padaliin ang kasal. Ang totoo nyan, they should’ve been married a long time ago. Sya lang itong nagdi-delay.

“Did she take your mind with her? Mukhang nakarating ka na ng Paris ah.”

He smiled. “Would you rather my mind be here?”

No, just your heart. “Aba natural! Ayokong makipag-usap sa tuod.”

He chuckled. “I bet you’re just jealous.”

“Ilusyunado ka rin pala no?”

“Ayaw pang umamin nito. Siguro kaya hindi ka nagbo-boyfriend kase in love ka sa ‘kin. No? Ano?!”

She grimaced. “Malala na yang pagka-delusional mo. Pa-mental ka na friend. Firstly, wala akong boyfriend kase busy ako sa career ko. Second, masyado silang marami, hindi ako makapili. And third, I just don’t feel like it. So there.”

“Defensive ka masyado ah.”

“Stay out of my love life.”

“Fine, I’ll be busy with mine anyway.”

Days sure pass by like a breeze. The two of them spend almost every hour together, reliving the old times. Brielle finds herself falling in love once more. She couldn’t help it. Ever since high school, she had always been in love with Eron. She just doesn’t show it, because they’re friends. And friends shouldn’t fall in love with the other.

“And friends shouldn’t fall in love with each other...tama. Hayy....”

Her phone rang. It was Eron, inaaya sya sa aplaya. “Bakit?” Tanong nya.

“Basta..pumunta ka na lang.”

“Bakit nga kase?”

She heard him sigh. “Wala. Kung ayaw mo, di wag.” Pinatay nito ang phone.

Mga ilang minuto din ang nilakad nya bago nya narating ang aplaya. Nakita nya itong nakaupo sa buhanginan.

“Oy.” Tawag nya. Lumingon ito na nakangiti.

“Ang tagal mo naman.”

Umupo sya sa tabi nito. “Ano’ng gagawin natin dito?”

“We’ll watch the sunset together.” Sabi nito.

She pouted. “Yun lang? Kita ko rin naman ang araw sa ‘min eh. Sayang lang lakad ko.” Tumayo sya at akmang aalis na. Tumayo din ito at hinila sya papunta sa dagat. Napasigaw sya ng inilubog nito ang ulo nya sa tubig.

“Stop it!” Sigaw nya when her head surfaced. Tumawa ito. “Ano’ng nangyari? Takot ka na ngayon sa dagat?”

Hinampas nya ito. “Salbahe ka! Ang ganda ganda ng damit ko eh!”

“Come on. Ang tagal ko ng hindi nakakapag-swimming eh.” Aya nito sa kanya.

“Hindi ka ba makakapaglangoy ng mag-isa?”

Umiling ito. “You know I can’t swim.”

She held her hands akimbo. “So ano pala ako rito? Lifeguard?”

He laughed. “Sort of. Give me CPR when I drown.” Having said that, he went off swimming. Sort of. Langoy-aso kase. Napatawa sya. In his 27 years, hindi man lang ito nag-effort mag-aral lumangoy. Hindi na sya umalis sa kinatatayuan nya. Pinanuod lang nya itong lumangoy. Medyo malayo na rin ito pero hindi sya nag-aalala kase nagawa pa nitong kumaway sa kanya. And he keeps on bobbing his head. Napailing sya. “Isip-bata talaga.” And then he disappeared.

Without thinking twice, she swam to where he was. She pulled him out of the water

and slapped him. “Eron..hey! Wake up!”

Hindi ito gumalaw. Nainis sya. Nanti-trip na naman siguro ito. She slapped him again and pounded on his chest. “Dammit Eron. Wake up! You’re scaring me..”

But he still didn’t move. That’s when she started to cry. “I hate you! Wake up!” She snorted and put her lips on his. She blew some air. Nothing happened. She did it again. And again. She gasped when he put his hand on her hair and deepened the kiss. Dali-dali syang lumayo. He sat up, smiling. “Not bad for our first kiss.” Sabi nito.

Tiningnan nya ito ng masama.

“What?” Natatawa nitong tanong.

Inirapan lang nya ito.

“Did I bite your tongue?” Pilyo nitong tanong.

“Hindi ka na nakakatuwa. You scared me.” She said.

He came near her and hugged her. “Sorry na.”

Itinulak nya ito. “Don’t ever do that again.” She stood up and left.

He knocked at the door. Si Mang Nelson ang nagbukas. “Good morning po. Andyan po ba si Bree?”

Lumingon muna si Mang Nelson bago nagsalita ng malakas. “Wala daw eh.”

He chuckled. “Asan daw po?”

“Aba’y nasa labas daw. Tulog.”

Biglang may humampas sa balikat ni Mang Nelson. Nagtatago lang pala sa likod ng pintuan si Brielle. “Papa naman eh..”

Napatawa si Mang Nelson. “O sya. Ako’y lalarga muna. Maiwan ko na kayong dalawa.”

“Sige po. Ingat po.”

“May problema ba tayo?” Tanong ni Eron sa kanya ng makaalis si Mang Nelson.

“Ano namang magiging problema natin?”

“Are you angry at me because I kissed you?”

“No.” She said. “I was angry at you...because you kissed me and you’re getting married.”

“Yun lang ba? Can’t two friends kiss?”

Umiling sya. “Friends should never kiss.”

He sighed. “Okay. I promise that it will never happen again. Bati na tayo?”

She rolled her eyes. “I need a Hershey.”

As if on cue, Eron brought out a pack of Hersheys. “I know” he said. She smiled.

“Fine. You’re forgiven.”

“Pwede na ba ‘kong pumasok?”

A corner of her lip rose up. She motioned him to come in.

“So, when’s the big day? Sekreto pa din ba?”

He smiled. “A week from now. Adelle’s arriving this weekend.”

“Ah. Sigurado ka na ba sa kanya?”

Tumingin ito sa kanya. “Of course. I’m marrying her.”

“Well that’s reassuring.” She said sarcastically.

“What do you want me to say then?” he asked.

“Wala.” She took off her necklace. “Here. Take your ring.” Ang singsing na ibinigay nito dati ang nagsilbing pendant ng kwintas nya. She kissed his cheek. “I wish you happiness. I’m sorry I won’t be able to make it to your wedding. Goodbye.” Then she smiled and went outside. She’ll be out of his life. Probably, forever. Probably, for the better.

He was standing near the window, looking far away. Kanina pa naka-ready ang damit nya but he didn’t feel like dressing up. Something is wrong.

“Oh hijo, bakit hindi ka pa bihis? Baka ma-late tayo sa wedding mo.” He heard his mom say. Nilingon nya ito. His mother looked beautiful as ever. Ilang beses na ba nyang i-ni-magine ang ganitong scenario? His mom and dad on his side at the most important day of his life, seeing them smile as the mbride walks down the aisle. His bride. Now, when it all came true, bakit parang may mali?

“Ma..have you ever doubted your love for dad?”

Ngumiti ang mama nya. “No. I’ve always known that he’s the one hijo and I never doubted that. Bakit? Are you having second thoughts about Adelle?”

He didn’t answer. He just smiled and put on his coat.

“Do you, Eron Ramil Sumico, take this woman as your wife for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do you part?”

He didn’t hear what the priest just asked him. He stood there, tulala. He felt Adelle nudge him. Saka lang bumalik ang utak nya sa realidad. “S-sorry..what?”

He heard Adell huff. “I’m sorry. I can’t do this.” She said, na ikinagulat ng lahat.

“Adelle..” Pigil nya dito.

“I can’t marry someone who doesn’t love me..” sabi nito.

“It’s not like that—“

She held up her hand and said, “Just—give me the decency to walk away.” He watched as she walked down the aisle—in the opposite direction. Out of the church and out of his life. Women. Mga walk-out queen.

Brielle has her hands together and prayed. “Bigyan mo lang ako ng one week para kalimutan sya. Promise, after that, wala na talaga.” She smiled to herself and threw her cellphone in the Fontana D’Amore, the Fountain of Love. Nasa Nunzio, Italy sya, in her dream place to be wed. Sa harap ng famous fountain, she made a vow to forget Eron. “Siguro naman hindi na nya ‘ko mahahanap dito.”

A week later.

“Hello, I’m here again.” She greeted the fountain. Huminga sya ng malalim. “I wish to find a new love. Sana pagbigyan mo ‘ko.” She threw her coin in the fountain. Lahat daw kase ng nagwi-wish sa fountain na yun ay nakukuha ang mga gusto nila sa buhay. She hoped that it’ll work for her too.

“Ciao, bella.” She heard a man’s voice from behind her.

“Ang bilis naman.” She whispered to the fountain, smiling. Nilingon nya ang lalake.

“Hi.” Sabi nito, while waving his hand.

“What are you doing here?!”

Eron grinned. Her reaction was priceless. “Is that your way of greeting someone who just came all the way from the Philippines to see you?”

He saw her cross her arms. “How dare you leave your wife on your honeymoon?” She asked and then she looked around. “Or is she with you?”

“No one’s with me.”

“Why are you here Eron?”

He took a step towards her. “I came here to get you.” Itinaas nya ang kaliwang kamay. “Don’t worry. I’m still single.” He smiled. “And available..”

“So? Ano ngayon?”

He chuckled. “Baka lang kase gusto mong mag-apply.”

Hinampas sya nito sa braso but she’s smiling. “Sira ka talaga!” He caught her hands and placed it on his neck. He did the same with the other. Then he drew her closer. “I assure you na pasado ka na. No screenings. No tests. No interviews..” He kissed her forehead. “I love you Bree.”

She looked away. “This is wrong.”

Eron smiled. He felt her shivering. “But it feels so right, doesn’t it?”

She nodded. “Yes..”

“I’m sorry..for making you wait this long.”

Kumunot ang noo nito. “Wait for what?”

Eron took out the necklace she gave him. It has two rings in it. “Wait for that promise to come true.”

“It’s been ten years Eron, hindi na ‘ko magtataka kung hindi mo tupadin ang pangako mo.”

“Kasalanan mo rin naman eh. Hindi ka nagpapakita tuwing alumni. Hindi kita mahagilap. Eh di sana matagal na tayong kasal.”

She laughed. “Ang dami mo kaseng babae eh. Akala ko joke lang yung promise na yun.”

“Pano mo nga pala ako nahanap?”

“Your father gave me this.” Kinuha ni Eron ang isang coin sa bulsa nito. “I instantly knew na dito ka pupunta. Remember that dream you had ten years ago? You said that this is where you want to be married someday.”

“Naalala mo pa yun?”

He nodded. “Of course. I planned to marry you here. Actually, I brought your family with me..and my parents..and Mika. I-ninvite ko na rin yung mga classmates natin. We can get married anytime.”

“Adik ka ba? It takes years to prepare a wedding. And I don’t intend to be married inside the mayor’s office.”

He laughed. “I didn’t plan that either. Thanks to you, mas napadali na ang pagpaplano.”

“What did I do?”

“You wrote everything in your journal. Everything is settled. Even your gown.”

She gaped. “You got me Vera Wang?!”

He chuckled. “No silly. Si mama ang nag-asikaso. Mika contracted Vera Wang.”

“Ah..ganun ba?”

“So, all you have to do is say yes.” He inquired.

She raised her eyebrow. “Lumuhod ka muna.”

He happily obliged. “Brielle Erany Lopez..will you be my wife?”

She smiled. “Yes.”

Kinuha ni Eron ang tarheta na may lamang singsing. He slid it unto her finger and kissed her hand. Brielle then looked up at the statue at the center of the fountain and whispered, “Thank you.”

--end--

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First Love

“EARRINGS!”

Kyla shrieked. Hinahabol nya si Midos sa corridor ng school. As the school president, hindi nya tino-tolerate ang mga bawal sa eskwelahan. Midos always get on her nerves. Masyado itong pasaway. Medyo malayo na ito sa kanya. Mabilis kase itong tumakbo. May lahi ata itong snatcher.

“MIDOS! HUMANDA—KA-- ‘PAG-- NAHULI KITA!” Pahingal nyang banta. She halted. Hindi na kaya ng tuhod nya. Natatawang lumapit ito sa kanya.

“O ano? Suko ka agad? Ang hina mo naman.”

She glared at him. “Isusumbong kita sa principal!”

“Eh di magsumbong ka. Samahan pa kita, gusto mo?”

Inirapan nya ito. Alam nyang wala ring kwenta ang mga banta nya. Tiyahin kase nito ang principal. Isumbong man nya ito, alam nyang hanggang sermon lang ang aabutin nito.

“Hindi ka ba talaga magtitino? Ga-graduate ka na ah.”

“Kaya nga hindi na ‘ko magtitino. Hindi na ako makakaganito sa college eh.”

Bigla nyang hinablot ang tenga nito. “Aray! Aray!” Reklamo nito.

“Kapag nakita ko ulet na naka-hikaw ka, pipilasin ko yang tenga mo, intiendes?”

Midos held up his hand. “Oo na!” Tinanggal nito ang hikaw at padabog na ibinigay sa kanya. “BAKULAW!” Sigaw pa nito habang tumatakbong palayo.

--

Kyla sighed. Araw-araw na lang ganoon ang eksena nila sa school. Lagi na lang syang bugnot. Bukod kase kay Midos, may mahigit 500 katao pa na nagbibigay ng sakit ng ulo sa kanya. Minsan naisip na nyang mag-quit sa pagiging presidente, pero lagi naman kase syang ipinagtutulakan ng mga teachers na tumakbo. Pangatlong termino na nga nya ito. Wala naman kaseng kumakalaban sa kanya.

“Kyla, tawag ka ni ma’am Lizaro sa faculty.” Tawag sa kanya ng classmate nya.

“Sige, pupunta na ‘ko. Itatapon ko lang itong basura.” Uwian na noon. Lahat ng mga kasama nyang cleaners, umalis na. Sya naman lagi ang natitira. Hinahayaan na lang nya sila. Nakakasawa ring mamillit.

--

Sa may likod ng eskwelahan ang tapunan ng basura. Itinataktak nya ang trash can ng may napansin syang nakadikit sa pader. Isang origami na hugis puso. Nilapitan nya ito at binuklat. May sulat sa loob.

How can I tell her I love her? I don’t know.. I guess I’ll be forever like this... loving her from a distance...

Kumunot ang noo nya. Sino namang emo ang mag-iiwan ng ganitong mensahe? At sa tabi pa ng basurahan. She decided to throw it away. Then she stopped. Paano kung hindi naman ito para sa kanya? She decided to keep it. Wala naman kaseng pangalan ang sulat eh.

--

Kinabukasan, nakita na lamang nya na wala na ang sulat na idinikit nya sa pader. He smiled.

--

“Who wants to answer?”

Tanong ng teacher sa kanila. Walang nagtaas ng kamay. Trigo kase. Si Mr. Dimaculangan ang teacher. Sobrang terror nito.

“Mananawag na naman ba ako? Sige..Bustamante!”

Napalingon ang lahat kay Midos, na noon ay tutuka-tuka sa antok. Hinampas lang sya ng classmate nyang si Lance kaya bigla syang natauhan. “S-sir?”

Inilahad ng teacher ang chalk at sinenyasan syang pumunta sa unahan. Napilitan syang tumayo.

After 5 minutes ng pakikipagtitigan sa blackboard, kinutusan sya ni Mr. Dimaculangan. “Ayan na nga ba ang sinasabi ko eh! Tulog kase ng tulog!”

Napakamot sya.

“Kyla, pakitulungan nga itong si Midos.”

Kyla stood up. And once again, ipinakita nito ang dahilan kung bakit sya ang best in math sa buong klase nila.

“Very good. Mga minsan nga ay turuan mo itong si Bustamante at ng makasagot naman sa klase ko.” Sabi ni Mr. Dimaculangan. Midos just rolled his eyes.

--

I hope that you would notice the longing behind my laughs. I wish you could see the pain beneath my smiles. I tried to pretend that I didn’t care but it hurts everytime you believe that..

“Napaka-drama naman nito.” Kyla ripped a page from her notebook. She began to write.

Who are you?

Pagkasulat ay gumupit sya ng tape at idinikit iyon sa pader tapos ay saka ibinulsa ang sulat na nakuha nya.

--

After she left, he stepped out away from the trees. Nilapitan nya ang sulat at kinuha iyon. Then he started to write.

--

“Hoy bakulaw!”

Kyla stopped walking. Napapikit na lang sya. Umagang-umaga, panira ng araw. She drew a sharp breath.

“Bakit pangit?!”

“Mukha mo.”

“Ano ba’ng kailangan mo? Umagang-umaga nang-aasar ka!”

Ngumiti si Midos. “Pautang naman.”

Napatawa sya. “Sagad talaga sa buto ang kakapalan ng mukha mo ano?”

“Sige na. Naiwan ko lang kase yung baon ko sa’min.”

“Kasalanan ko?” Pagtataray nya. “Magpakabait ka muna, baka sakaling maawa ako sa’yo.”

Sinimangutan sya nito. “Wag na nga. Damot.” Saka ito umalis.

--

Pagdating ng tanghali, naabutan nya itong mag-isa sa classroom, nakaub-ob. Tinapik nya ito. “Hoy! Bawal mag-stay sa classroom ‘pag lunch! Tumayo ka dyan.”

Umungot ito. “Pagbigyan mo na...”

“Hindi pwede. Rules are rules.”

Tumunghay ito. “Hindi mo na nga ako pinautang, balak mo pa akong paglawayin sa canteen. Itinutulog ko na nga lang ang gutom ko eh.”

She felt a surge of guilt. Humugot sya ng singkwenta sa bulsa. “O hayan, pumunta ka ng canteen. Bilis! Baka abutan ka ng time.”

His face lit up. Tuwang tuwa ito ng kunin ang pera sa kanya. “Thanks!” He got up and kissed her cheek. Saka ito nagtatakbo palabas. Naiwan syang nakatayo habang sapupo ang pisngi nya.

--

Later that day, nakakuha na naman sya ng sulat sa pader.

I’m not the kind of man who deserves you but I still longed for that to change. I wish I could change..to be someone you’d want. Someone you’d love. Someone who’s not gonna be an extra burden. I wish I could be all that to you and more. But for now, I’m just this silly boy who isn’t brave enough to say these things to you in person.

She tore the paper off the wall and wrote her own.

DO YOU KNOW ME?

--

The next day...

Lunchtime noon pero tinatamad kumain si Kyla kaya naisipan muna niyang pumunta sa library. The corridor was deserted. Tahimik. She closed her eyes and savored the silence.

“Ano kase...matagal na kitang gusto. Sana hayaan mo akong maging girlfriend mo..”

She heard a voice say. Napamulat sya at luminga. Saan naman kaya nanggaling ang boses na yun?

“Sorry..pero..may iba na kase akong gusto..”

This time it was a guy. Kumunot ang noo nya. Para kaseng..kilala nya ang boses na yun.

Narinig nyang humikbi ang babae. “P-pero...madali rin naman akong mahalin. Kung bibigyan mo ako ng chance..b-baka..mahalin mo rin ako..”

Sinundan nya ang boses hanggang sa mapatapat sya sa science laboratory. Mukhang doon nga nag-uusap ang dalawang iyon.

She heard the guy’s voice again. “I’m sorry. Hindi naman kase ganun kadali yun eh.”

“Bakit naman? Kung may iba ka ng gusto..bakit wala kang girlfriend?”

Bumuntong-hininga ang lalaki. “Ang totoo nyan..hindi ko kase alam kung gusto rin nya ‘ko eh. Mukhang hindi..”

“Ayon naman pala eh. Sa ‘kin ka na lang...para garantisadong mahal kita, di ba?”

Pagpupumilit ng babae.

“Makakahanap ka rin ng taong magmamahal sa’yo. Yung mas higit pa sa’kin. As for me..well..sya lang talaga ang gusto ko. Sorry.”

Silence.

.

.

.

She listened intently. Then she heard the girl laughed. “Ang saklap ano? I love you but you love her. Sana lang hindi ka rin nya mahalin ng patas na tayo.”

Biglang bumukas ang pinto. Napaurong sya. Lumabas ang isang babae. Tiningnan sya nito. Nagulat sya. Kilala nya ito. It was Trish. Third year na nakalaban nya noon sa oration. Nagtatakbo itong palayo.

“Kyla?”

Nilingon nya ang tumawag. She didn’t expect to see Midos there. So..he was the guy.
“Ikaw?”

Tiningnan lang sya nito. “Kanina ka pa rito?”

“Ah..ano..hindi naman. Napadaan lang..s-sige.Una na ‘ko.”

“Kyla..”

Nilingon nya ulet ito.

“B-bakit?”

His face looked solemn. Parang may kung anong bumara sa lalamunan nya. Hindi kase sya sanay ng ganito ito. Palagi silang nagbabangayan. Palagi itong maingay. Ni minsan, hindi pa sya nito tinawag sa pangalan nya..ngayon lang.

He looked away. “Wala...”

--

You are everything I desire. I hope the universe would conspire, hoping that they’d agree with me. There’s no more perfect that the combined you and me. :)

--

Kyla smiled as she saw the note. For some reasons unknown to her, she finds herself gradually being attached to Mr. Note, as she had preferred to call him. In spite of her mind’s opposition, mas pinili nyang sundin ang puso nya.

Magpakilala ka na..pwede? :)

She left the paper taped on the wall and went away with a smile on her face.

--

“Ang ganda ng view ano?” Tanong ni Lance kay Midos. Nasa isang classroom sya sa second floor ng building nila, nakasilip sa bintana.

“Huh?” Kunot-noo nyang nilingon ito. “Ano na namang pinagsasasabi mo dyan ha?” Tanong nya dito.

Itinuro nito ang tinitingnan nya sa baba. Nagpapraktis kase ng interpretative dance ang mga piling estudyante ng section nila para sa nalalapit na Recognition Day.

“Ganda ‘no?” Nakangisi nitong tanong.

He smiled. “Maganda nga.”

“Kung ako sa’yo pre, liligawan ko na yan.”

Umiling sya. “Nakakatakot eh.”

Napatawa si Lance. “Takot ka dyan?”

“Takot akong ma-basted. Baka di ko kayanin.”

Tinapik nito ang balikat nya. “Pare..matagal mo nang pinipigilan yan. Kung ako sa’yo, sasabihin ko na. Baka maunahan ka pa ng iba dyan..sige ka.”

“Hindi yan..simula grade one kilala ko na yan. Walang makapanligaw dyan. Nakakatakot kase.”

“Eh hanggang kelan mo balak maghintay?”

“Hangga’t kaya..”

“Eh panu pag bigla kong niligawan?” Pabirong tanong nito.

Tiningnan nya ito ng matalim. Alam nyang pabiro lang yung tanong nito pero naiinis sya. Nahalata yata nito iyon.

“Joke lang pre! Iba type ko.” Bawi nito.

“Buti naman.”

--

She felt the hairs of her nape rise. Kinilabutan sya. Para bang may nakatingin sa kanya sa malayo. Kyla looked around. Hanggang mapatingin sya sa taas. She saw two guys looking down at them. Mga classmates nya..sina Midos at Lance. Kinawayan sya ni Lance habang si Midos naman ay nag-iwas ng tingin.

“Antipatiko..” She muttered.

“Kyla. Ready na..”

“O-okay.”

--

Sorry, I can’t. I couldn’t bear the fact that you will get to hate me once you know who I really am. Sorry for being this frightened. I’m just afraid of losing you without even having the chance to have you.

“Ayy...duwag pala.” She said, disappointed. Akala pa naman nya ay makikilala na nya ito. She can’t wait to know who Mr. Note is. Ang dami nyang gustong itanong dito.

--

“Guys, punta kayo mamaya sa bahay ah.” Aya ni Shelby sa kanila. Birthday kase nito. Sweet 16. Palibhasa mayaman, bongga ang party.

“Nakakahiya naman..siguradong naka-formal lahat ng tao dun.” Reklamo ni Midos. Wala kase syang kahilig-hilig sa mga party.

“Hindi...sabi ko kay mama Hawaiian ang theme..kaya casual lang ang suot.”

“Pass muna ‘ko..” Sabi nya.

Lumapit si Lance sa kanila. “Pumunta ka na pre. Pupunta rin sya..”

“Talaga?” Interesado nyang tanong.

Ngumiti si Shelby. “Oo. Pinilit ko. Alam ko naman kaseng hindi ka pupunta ‘pag wala sya.”

He looked at Lance. Kahit kelan talaga hindi ito makapagtago ng sikreto. “Bakit mo sinabi?”

“Kase kapag hindi nya sinabi...basted sya sa’kin.”

“Kayo na?!” Gulat nyang tanong. “Kelan pa?”

Napakamot ng ulo si Lance. “Ano..kahapon lang.”

“Kaya kapag hindi ka sumama..sayang lang ang pagpipilit ko sa kanya.”

He sighed. Pasalamat na lang siguro sya at hanggang ngayon ay wala pang naglalabas ng lihim nya. “O sige..pupunta na ‘ko.”

“Magdala ka ng bihisan ah. Overnight tayo. Sabado naman bukas.”

“Sige sige.”

--

Mag-aalas otso na ng gabi, wala pa rin si Kyla sa party. Kung bakit pa kase hindi nya malaman laman kung saan ang bahay ni Shelby eh. Wala naman syang number nito. Hahayyy...

Maya-maya, biglang nag-ring ang cellphone nya. Walang pangalan ang caller.

“Hello?”

“Kyla! Asan ka na? Kanina pa kami naghihintay sa’yo!”

Si Shelby pala. “Shelby? Sorry..hindi kase naitanong kung san ang bahay mo.”

“Asan ka?”

“Nasa bahay pa eh. Hindi na ata ako makakapunta.”

“Wait. Ipapasundo kita.”

“Wag na. Makakaabala lang ako—“

“Di pwede. Papunta na sya dyan. Intayin kita ah. Bye.”

Shelby hung up.

Tumayo si Kyla para maghanda ng damit. Biglang bumuhos ang malakas na ulan. “Hayyy..malas.”

--

“Tao po!” May malakas na tawag sa labas. Nagising sya mula sa pagkakaidlip. Nakatulog na pala sya. Ang lamig-lamig kase... umuulan pa. Dali-dali syang kumuha ng payong at lumabas.

Nakita nyang nakatayo sa may gate nila si Midos.

“Midos? Bakit wala kang dalang payong?!” Isinukob nya ito sa payong nya at hinila papasok a bahay nila. “Tsk. Kasalanan mo pag nagkasakit ka ha..”

“Ulan lang to.”

“Ulan lang ba? Eh pano kung magkasakit ka?”

“Uyyy..concerned?” Tanong nito ng nakangiti.

Inirapan nya ito. “Feeling mo naman.”

“Joke lang. Wala kang kasama?”

“Wala. Nasa lamay sila lahat.”

“Hindi ka ba natatakot? Mag-isa ka lang kanina pa?”

“Hindi. Oo.”

“Sabagay..nakakatakot ka rin naman.”

Tinaasan nya ito ng kilay. He gave her a hearty laugh in response.

--

“O, magbihis ka muna.” Inabutan nya ito nung isa nyang t-shirt na masyadong malaki

sa kanya. Unisex naman ‘yung shirt. ‘Yun bang para sa mga org. Eh napalaki lang ‘yung size nya.

Agad naman itong sumunod at nagsimulang maghubad sa harap nya.

“Hoy!” Pigil nya rito. “Ano’ng ginagawa mo?”

“Magbibihis.”

Hinampas nya ito ng damit. “Adik! ‘Wag sa harap ko!”

“Bakit? May pagnanasa ka sa ‘kin?” Nakangisi nitong tanong.

Hinampas nya ulit ito ng damit. “Kapalmukz ka talaga kahit kelan. Hayyyy!!” Iniwanan nya ito at nagpunta sa kusina. When she came back, he has changed his clothes already.

“Ano--Tayo na?” Tanong nya.

Kumunot ang noo nito. “Ang bilis mo naman. Hindi ka pa nga nanliligaw eh.”

She smiled. “Ayy..pacute. Hindi naman cute.”

“Cute ako.” Pagtanggi nito.

“Ows? Sabi nino?”

“Sabi ko.” Sabi nito. Nagkangitian na lang silang dalawa.

Outside, unti-unting tumitila na ang ulan. Nang mahinang patak na lang ito ay napagpasyahan na nilang umalis.

--

“Thank goodness! Akala ko hindi na kayo darating.”

She gave Shelby an apologetic look. “Sorry, nagpatila pa kase kami.”

Shelby smiled. “Okay lang. At least you came. Tara na sa loob. Nomo na lang ah. Tapos na kase yung kainan. Tagal nyo weh.”

--

Halos lahat ng bisitang nandoon ay may tama na. Nadatnan nila ang mga ito na naglalaro ng ‘Spin-the-Bottle’.

“O ayan na pala sila. Sali kayo oi.”

“Etong session natin ay tatawagin nating ‘Maboteng Usapan.’ Tapatan na!” Lance announced enthusiastically. Their classmates cheered with him. Bigla syang kinabahan...

Sa pangatlong ikot ay sa kanya napatapat ang bote. Tuwang-tuwa ang mga kaklase nya. Si Shelby ang nagtanong. “Bawal ang KJ ah. Sino crush mo?”

Tutok ang atensiyon sa kanya ng lahat. “Wala.” Pasimple nyang sagot.

“Weh? Hindi nga?”

“Wala nga.”

“Abnormal yan eh.” Singit ni Midos. Inirapan lang nya ito.

“Sino nga Kyla? Kahit yung katiting lang. Paghanga lang naman eh.” Pamimilit ni Shelby.

“Wala..wala dito.” Pag-amin nya.

Namilog ang mata ni Midos. “Ows? Nagkaka-crush pala ang bakulaw?”

Binato nya ito ng unan.

“So..sino?” Tanong ni Mia, isa pa nyang classmate.

“Hindi ko kilala eh.”

“Ngek. Ano kaya yun? Crush na hindi kilala...”

“Ni hindi ko pa nga nakikita eh. Kaya walang kwenta kung tatanungin nyo pa ‘ko tungkol dyan.”

--

“Whooooo!! Si Midos naman!”

Pasimpleng tumayo si Midos at akmang aalis. Hinarang ito ni Lance. “Whoi pre, walang takasan.”

“Magsi-CR lang ako saglit!”

“Sus! Ayaw laang mabisto. Sasagot ka muna bago mag-CR.”

Napilitan itong maupo. Hindi maipinta ang mukha. Bigla tuloy sya ca-curious sa isasagot nito. Aminan daw ng crush eh. Sino kaya crush nito?

--

“Ano na?”

“Wala.” Sabi nya. “Abnormal din ako eh.”

James snickered. “Kung ayaw mo umamin, isasabi ko na lang. Kilala ko naman eh.”

Pinandilatan nya ito. Saka naman sumabat si Monica. “Oo nga. Kilala na namin. Sinabi ni Lance.”

He glared at Lance. Madaldal talaga ito kahit kelan. Nginitian lang sya nito na para bang nananadya.

“Ano na? Amin na kase...” Pamimilit ni Shelby.

--

Nagtataka si Kyla at parang gusto nyang magtampo. Bakit sya lang ata ang hindi nakakakilala ng crush ni Midos? Pero sabagay, di naman sila close. Pero kahit na— ilang taon na rin naman silang magkaklase eh. “Sino nga Midos?” She asked.

She heard him sigh. Dahan-dahan itong pumikit at dahan-dahang itinuro ang daliri....sa kanya.

She gasped. “Oh ayan. Masaya na kayo?” Sabi nito.

Natahimik ang lahat. Then Monica spoke. “Seryoso?”

Midos looked at them, confused. She looked at them too. Hindi nya maintindihan kung ano’ng nangyayari. “A-akala ko ba alam nyo na?” Takang tanong ni Midos.

She saw Lance smile. “Naniwala ka naman.”

--

Napasapo si Midos. Nabisto na, naloko pa! “Tado ka Lance..”

“At least alam na nya, di ba?” Natatawang dipensa nito.

He sighed. Ano pa nga ba magagawa nya?

--

“Paikutin ulit ang bote!”

Sya na ang nagpaikot ng bote. Tumama uli ito kay Kyla. Tinudyo tuloy ulit sila ng mga hinayupak nyang kaklase. “Uyyy.. soul mates talaga oh..”

He ignored them. Nakikita nya kaseng naiirita na si Kyla.

“O, tanong na..”

Shelby raised her hand. “Pano ‘pag niligawan ka ni Midos, Kyla? Sasagutin mo ba?”

--

Hindi na nagulat si Kyla sa tanong. Pero kahit papano, nadoble ang kaba na nararamdaman nya. Before she could answer though, bigla na lang tumayo si Midos.

“O pre..san ka pupunta?” Tanong dito ni Lance.

“Magpapahangin lang.”

“Ayyy..KJ.” Reklamo nito.

A corner of Midos’ lips curled up. “Saglit lang ako.” Sabi nito at pumunta sa terrace kung saan walang tao.

Feeling nya ay ayaw nitong marinig ang sagot nya. Sa araw-araw ba naman kase na pang-aasar nito sa kanya simula ata nung grade 2, wala na syang ibang naramdaman dito kundi inis.

She looked at her classmates. Hindi nya alam kung ano’ng isasagot nya.

“O, natameme ka dyan?” Puna ni Monica.

“Wag nyo na kase ako iloko sa kanya. Wala rin namang mangyayari eh.”

“Wala ka ba talagang feelings para sa kanya? Kase ikaw..matagal ka ng gusto nun.”

“Naniwala naman kayo agad? Eh halos lahat na ata ng babae sa school, sinasabi nyang crush nya.” Dipensa nya.

“Hindi. Ikaw lang talaga. Simula elementary pa tayo.” Pamimilit ni Lance.

She sighed. “Wag nyo na lang buksan ulit yang topic na yan. Magkaka-ilangan lang kami eh.”

Biglang pumasok si Midos. Malungkot ang mukha nito. “Guys, tutulog na ‘ko.” Paalam nito.

“Sige, ipapahanda ko na yung tutulugan niyo.” Shelby answered. Nagsitayuan na rin ang iba. Feeling tuloy nya galit silang lahat sa kanya dahil sa mga sinabi nya.

That night, she slept with a bothered heart.

--

LUNES.

Kyla felt uneasy. Nasanay na kase sya na pagkapasok nya ng school ay may binubulyawan sya. Ngayon, tahimik si Midos. Naka-proper uniform at wala ng earrings. Mukha na itong normal na estudyante. Yun nga lang, wala ng thrill ang umaga nya.

Nang umagang iyon ay nagbigay ng surprise quiz si Mr. Dimaculangan. Nakita nyang nag-angalan ang mga kaklase nya. Habang sya naman ay prenteng nakaupo lang. Hindi na nya kasalanan na sya lang ang nagbabasa ng notes tuwing weekends.

Habang nagki-quiz ay sumulyap sya kay Midos. Nagkakamot ito ng ulo at mukhang gusto ng punitin ang papel. She smiled. At least hindi lahat, nagbago.

--

“Pass the papers!” Nakakagulat na sigaw ni Mr. Dimaculangan. Nagkukumahog ang lahat to the last minute. Si Midos ay nakaub-ob pa rin, perhaps trying to figure out kung ano ang sagot sa mga equation na binigay dito.

“Ang mahuli, hindi na tatanggapin ah..”

She looked at Midos. Mukhang wala itong balak magpasa. Hindi rin ata nito naririnig na nagbibilang na ang teacher. Hinablot agad nya ang papel nito at ipinasa kasabay ang papel nya. Napatingin na lang ito sa kanya.

“May points din naman kahit mali eh. Mabuti na yun kesa ma-zero ka.” Paliwanag nya.

Midos smiled weakly. “Salamat.”

--

Kinahapunan, as usual, sya na naman ang natirang maglinis ng classroom. Pagkatapos magwalis, dali-dali syang nagtapon ng basura, hoping that she’ll see a note again.

Pagdating nya, nakita nyang malinis ang pader. Napasimangot sya. Siguro nga hanggang secret na lang ang pagka-secret admirer nito at wala ng balak magpakilala.

--

“O.”

Napatingin sya sa isang kamay na may rebisco. Then she looked up to see Midos. “Ano yan?”

“Merienda.”

“Busog pa ‘ko.”

Inilapag nito ang rebisco sa desk nya. “Bayad ko yan kaya ‘wag mong tanggihan.”

“Bayad saan?” Kunot-noo nyang tanong.

“Sa pagpapasa ng papel ko.”

“Hindi ko naman pinapabayaran ah.”

Kinuha nito ang biscuit. “Di wag.”

“Akin na pala.” Bawi nya at pilit na kinukuha ang rebisco dito.

“Ang gulo mo.” Sabi nito at inilapag ulit ang rebisco sa mesa. “Welcome.”

“Salamat.”

--

Recognition day. Kinuhang taga-picture si Midos ng klase nila. Lahat kase ay may mga kanya-kanyang gagawin, sya lang ang wala.

Everything went well according to plan. Magaling talagang mag-organize si Kyla. Bukod pa doon, first honor ulit ito.

After ng program, he handed the camera to Lance para maipaprint at i-post sa bulletin ng school.

Napakamot si Lance ng ulo ng makita ang mga kuha nya.

“Bakit?” Takang tanong niya.

“Eh wala ata akong mailalagay sa bulletin natin nito.” Ipinakita nito ang mga kuha nyang picture. Puro mukha ni Kyla. Si Kyla ng sinasabitan ng award. Si Kyla na nagsasayaw. Si Kyla na naglalakad...

“Yung grupo grupo na lang yung ipa-print mo.”

Lance sighed. “Pasalamat ka in love ka...sige.”

--

Buti na lang magaling magremedyo si Lance. Pero marami ring nakakapansin na sa

lahat ng group shot ay nandun si Kyla. Palagi namang sya ang itinuturo nitong salarin.

“Malapit na pasko no?” Tanong ni Lance sa kanya.

“Pre, 27 days pa..’wag kang excited.”

“Bakit? Ikaw ba hindi na-eexcite?” Takang tanong nito.

“Hindi eh.” Sagot nya. “Sa Singapore daw kami magpapasko.”

Namilog ang mata ni Lance. “Huwaw! Singapore? Pasama pre!”

“Gusto mo ikaw na lang ang pumunta.”

“Bakit ayaw mo?”

“Mas gusto ko dito.” Simple nyang sagot.

“Bakit?”

“Kase dito..may simbang gabi..may puto-bumbong. May keso de bola..”

Kumunot ang noo ni Lance. “Ayaw mo sa imported pre?”

“Sawa na ‘ko dun. Sana nga ma-convince ko si mama na magpapaiwan na lang ako rito.”

“Kelan ba kayo aalis?”

He shrugged. “Sa 15 daw.”

“Hindi ka sasama sa party? Ay kawawang bata. Ang sasarap pa naman ng pagkain dun.”

Sighing, Midos reached for his pocket and stared out the window. “Pipilitin ko talaga si mama kahit ano’ng mangyari.”

--

December 15. Umaga. Sa bahay nina Kyla nagpi-prepare ng mga handa. Masaya ang lahat kahit nangangamoy usok, sibuyas at karne na ang iba. For the first time, ang gaan ng pakiramdam nya. Siguro ganun talaga kapag magpapasko..palaging positibo ang mood ng bawat isa. Kaya paborito nya ang pasko eh. Even once a year, nagkakaroon ng chance na magkasundo-sundo lahat.

“Sayang ano, kulang tayo.” Pahayag ni Shelby. Ang tinutukoy nito ay si Midos. Kaninang madaling-araw ay lumipad na ang pamilya nito papuntang Singapore. In a way, malungkot. Ito kase ang nagpapasaya sa klase. Hindi nagiging boring ang isang bagay kapag kasama itong gumagawa. Pero masaya na rin sya—at least, walang magulo.

“Naku...for sure, tuwang tuwa yun dun. Biruin mo, sa Singapore sya nakakapag-Pasko.”

“Sabi nga ni Lance..ayaw daw niyang pumunta eh.”

“Bakit daw?”

“Mas maganda raw kase ang pasko dito.” Tumingin ito sa kanya ng may kahulugan. Nag-iwas sya ng tingin. Wala na yatang isang araw na hindi sila tinutudyo ng mga ito. Wala naman itong epekto sa kanya eh. Nakakainis lang.

--

Kinagabihan, masayang nagkakainan ang lahat. Kakatapos lang ng program nila. Pahirapan sa pagpaparte ng pagkain—as usual. Hindi naman kase maiiwasan na mapadami ang kain. Wala naman silang reklamo doon. Pasko naman eh.

“Midos!” Bulalas ni James na ikinagulat nila. Pumasok si Midos na naka-porma at may dalang dalawang plastic bag ng Duty Free. Ngeks. Bakit nandito sya? Tanong nya sa sarili. Ang alam nya kase ngayon ang alis nito papuntang Singapore eh. Pero apparently, hanggang Duty Free lang ang inialis nito.

“Late na ba ‘ko?”

Nagsi-hindi-an ang mga ito. Napailing din sya. Suddenly, there’s a light back in everybody’s face. Lalo na ng ilabas nito ang mga chocolates na nasa loob ng plastic bag. Nagkukumahog ang lahat sa paglapit dito. At dahil sa bilis ng pangyayari at dahil na rin sa sya ang nagsasandok ng mga pagkain—naubusan sya ng chocolate. Hindi nya maiwasang mapasimangot. Sayang..masarap pa naman ang imported na tsokolate.

“Hi.”

She looked at a big, brown teddy bear na may nakadikit na rose at chocolate.

“Ay ang daya..mas bongga yung kanya.”

Reklamo ng isa nyang kaklase.

“Hayaan mo na..natural lang yun pag nililigawan ka.”

Sagot naman ng isa.

Ibinaba ni Midos ang teddy bear to reveal his smiling face. Bakit ba parang ang

cute, cute nito ngayon? Ah—siguro kase..dahil hindi nya ito nakita buong maghapon. Na-miss lang siguro nya ito.

“Akala mo siguro hindi kita bibigyan ano?”

She smiled. “Para sa’kin pala yan?”

“Para kanino pa ba?”

“Akala ko para kay ma’am.”

“Wala naman akong gusto kay ma’am eh.” Nakangiti pa rin ito.

“Weh..pacute.”

“Cute naman talaga.”

“Sus.” Kinuha nya ang teddy bear.

“Bakit parang ayaw mong maniwalang cute ako?”

Tinaasan nya ito ng kilay. “Sinabi ko ba’ng hindi ako naniniwala?”

Lumapad ang ngiti ni Midos. “So...cute talaga ‘ko?”

“Oo na. Cute ka na. Magtigil ka lang.”

She saw his eyes sparkle.

--

When everybody had their fill, nagtungo ang lahat sa gitna ng classroom para sa exchange gift. Si Midos lang ang naiwang nakaupo. Hindi naman kase ito kasali.

Matapos mag-exchange gift ay tinabihan nya ito.

“O.” Inabutan nya ito ng regalo. Para sana sa teacher nila iyon pero naaawa sya dito. Wala kase itong natanggap na regalo.

“Para sa’kin ba talaga yan?”

“Hindi.”

“Eh bakit mo binibigay?”

“Eh kase kawawa ka naman..wala kang regalo.” Sabi nya na bahagyang naiilang.

Ngumiti ito. “Okay lang naman eh. Masaya na ‘kong di mo ako tinatarayan.”

“Ayaw mong tanggapin?” Mataray nyang tanong.

Kinuha nito agad ang regalo nya. “Sabi ko nga, akin na..”

“Magsisimba ka ba bukas?” Maya-maya’y tanong nya.

“Sasamahan mo ‘ko?”

“Ano..kase..nagyayaya sina Lance.”

Nag-isip ito ng saglit. “Ililibre mo ba ‘ko ng bibingka?”

“Bakit naman kita ililibre?”

“Para mapilit mo ‘ko.”

Tinapik nya ang ulo nito. “Feeling..kung ayaw mong sumama, okay lang no.”

“Eh di sasama na ’ko para hindi okay.”

“Huh?” Kumunot ang noo nya.

“Wala.”

“Hoy kayong dalawa..’wag kayong mag-solo dyan. Umakyat na daw lahat sa social hall at magpa-party party na!” Sabi ni Monica na sumasayaw-sayaw pa sa may pintuan. Napatawa silang dalawa.

Midos held out his hand. “Tara?”

Pinalis nya ang kamay nito. “Lakad na.”

Hinila nito ang kamay nya. At magkahawak-kamay silang pumasok ng social hall.

--

Hiyang-hiya sya sa mga reaksiyon ng mga kaklase nya. Mahigpit kase ang pagkakahawak ni Midos sa kanya kaya hindi sya makawala. Hanggang sa makaupo sila ay hawak pa rin nito ang kamay nya.

“Hindi mo ba talaga ako bibitawan?!” Paasik nyang tanong.

Ngumiti lang ito sa kanya.

“Nakakainis ka!” Hinampas nya ang braso nito. “Bitiwan mo na kase ako.”

“Sasayaw muna tayo.” Iyon lang at hinila sya nito sa gitna. He took her hands at ipinulupot ito sa batok nya. He drew her closer..to the point that she could actually hear his heartbeat and feel his breath. Parang pinangilabutan ang buo nyang katawan. Why does it feel so good to be in his arms?

--

Halos mag-aapat na tugtog na ng bigla syang hinila nito pabalik sa upuan. Finally, he let her hand go. Pero bakit ganun? Parang biglang may nagkulang. Hindi na nya maintindihan ang sarili nya. One moment she was begging for him to let her hand go. At ngayon naman, parang gusto nyang hawakan nito ulit ang kamay nya.

“Sorry.” He said apologetically. Tumayo ito at lumabas ng hall.

Hindi nya alam kung bakit ganun ang pakiramdam nya. Para bang maling nagtampo ito sa kanya. It’s as if, somehow, she needs to comfort and reassure him. She stood half-heartedly and followed him out of the hall. Hindi pa nya ito nakita agad.

--

“Para sa ’kin?” She heard his voice. Sinundan nya ang boses nito at nakita nya ito sa isang bakanteng classroom..with Trish. Hindi nya alam kung bakit bigla syang nainis.

“Oo. Gift ko sa’yo.”

Nakita nyang nagkamot ng ulo si Midos. “Baka may kapalit yan ah..”

“Kiss lang.” She heard her say. She gritted her teeth. Malandi talaga.

“Kiss?!”

“Sa cheeks lang naman eh. Para lang maging masaya ang Pasko ko. Sige na....”

“Sa cheeks lang ha?” Paninigurado ni Midos.

Nakita nyang tumango si Trish at inilahad ang pisngi. Midos gave her a peck on the cheek. Tuwang-tuwa si Trish. Habang sya naman ay nagpupuyos sa inis.

Hindi naman sa nagseselos ako.. sinungaling lang talaga sya kaya ako naiinis,

reklamo nya sa sarili.

Ako daw ang gusto pero panay ang halik sa ibang babae!

Napipika syang bumalik sa hall. Nagsumiksik sya sa likuran at umub-ob. The sounds are blaring at her ears pero wala na syang pakialam. Basta sya..matutulog.

--

“Kyla...hoy...gising na.”

Naalimpungatan sya.

“Papauwiin daw tayo ng maaga para makapag-simbang gabi tayo mamaya.”

Nagpunas sya ng mga mata at nag-iinat na bumangon. “Anong oras na ba?”

“10:30.”

“Saglit. Tutulong pa ‘ko sa pag-aayos dito. Umuna ka na.”

“Eh panu ka? Wala kang kasabay pag-uwi?” Wala nga syang kasabay. Pero sanay na sya. Duty calls.. And as president of the school, hindi naman ata magandang tingnan na sya ang kaunahang uuwi.

“Okay lang ako. Sige na.”

“Sigurado ka ah? Sige.” Kinawayan sya nito at umalis. Nagsimula na syang maglinis. Mabuti na lang at katulong nya ang mga kasamahan nyang officer. Matapos ang kinse minutos at madaliang paglilinis ay pinauwi na rin sila ng mga teachers.

--

“Hay buti..akala ko hindi ka na lalabas.” Nagulat sya ng bigla na lang magsalita si Midos na noon ay nakaupo sa labas ng pintuan ng hall.

“Iniintay mo ba ‘ko?”

“Hindi ba obvious?” Napangiti ito.

Inirapan nya ito. “Hindi ka man lang tumulong maglinis.”

Napakamot sya ng ulo. “Eh...kase nakatulog ako..sorry.”

“Sus. Nagdahilan pa. Umuwi ka na.”

Hinila sya nito sa kamay. “Tara na?”

Naumid ang dila nya sa pagkabigla. “T-teka..kukunin ko lang yung gamit ko sa classroom.” Binawi nya ang kamay nya at umuna sa classroom nila.

“Akin na yan.” Kinuha nito ang bag nya at ang malaking teddy bear na bigay nito. Kaya naman regalo na lang galing sa exchange gift ang natira sa kamay nya.

“Akin na to. Baka iuwi mo pa.” Inagaw uli nya ang teddy bear dito. Midos smiled.

“Buti naman nagustuhan mo yan.”

“Sinabi ko bang nagustuhan ko?”

Kumunot ang noo nito. “Bakit? Hindi ba?”

She smiled. “Joke lang. Salamat nga pala dito.”

Inakbayan sya nito. “Saka na lang kita sisingilin dyan.”

--

Dahil bakasyon, hindi na napuntahan ni Kyla ang pader sa may basurahan. Hindi na nya alam kung may note pang nakadikit dito. Basta sya...masaya lang sya nitong mga nakaraang araw. Nakumpleto nya ang simbang gabi dahil walang palya si Midos sa pagsundo sa kanya. Isang oras pa lang bago ang misa ay palagi na syang bihis.

Nang mag-Pasko ay nasa bahay nila ito maghapon. Halos ito ang katulong ng mga kapatid nya sa pag-ubos ng ube halaya at leche flan. Tuwang-tuwa pa ito sa pakikipaglaro sa bunso nyang kapatid. Pati ang nanay nya ay ayaw itong paalisin. Napaka-charming kase nito sa magulang nya.

It was like seeing him for the very first time. Ngayon lang nya narealize na underneath all those pranks, mabait pala ito...

“O, baka naman matunaw ako nyan.” Puna nito.

Nag-iwas sya ng tingin. Bakit ba kase nasasanay na syang tingnan ang pagmumukha nito? “Hindi kaya kita tinitingnan. Nag-iisip lang ako.”

“Habang nakatingin sa ‘kin?”

Binato nya ito ng throw pillow. “Asa ka naman.”

“Uyyy..guilty..” Natatawa nitong sabi.

“Heh!” Panininghal nya rito. Hindi nya alam kung over-confident lang ba ito o halatang halata na sya.

--

Dumating ang January na parang isang masarap na hangin. Kyla never felt happier. Not only na nabawasan ang sakit ng ulo nya, nadagdagan pa sya ng inspirasyon para mag-aral ng mas mabuti. Now walking to school seemed to be one of the happiest moments of her life.. Palagi kaseng nakaabang si Midos sa may gate ng school. And he will always smile whenever he sees her, kagaya na lang ngayon. When did he ever become so noticeable? Parang ito na lang halos ang gustong makita ng mata nya.

“Hi.” Nakangiting bati nito sa kanya.

“Hi.” She greeted back. “Ang aga mo ata?”

“Palagi naman akong maaga ah.”

“Sino’ng inaantay mo?” Painosente nyang tanong.

A corner of his lip lifted up. “Si Trish.”

Napasimangot sya. Alam nyang biro lang ito pero nainis sya bigla. Bakit naman kase halata nito agad pag nagseselos sya?

Nilampasan nya ito at dumeretso sya papasok ng school. Sinundan agad sya nito. “O ba’t nakasunod ka? Akala ko ba inaantay mo pa yung Trish mo?” Mataray nyang tanong.

Sumilay na naman ang nakakainis nitong ngiti. “Ba’t ganyan ka maka-react? Nagseselos ka ba?”

“Hindi ah!”

She heard him sigh. “Fine. Hindi na.”

--

Pagpasok nila ng classroom, binati agad si Midos ng mga kaklase nila.

“Pre, congratz!”

“Salamat.” Nakangiting sabi nito. Kumunot ang noo nya. Congratz saan?

“Ano’ng meron?” Takang tanong nya.

He shrugged.

Maya-maya pa’y pumasok na ang homeroom teacher nila na si Mrs. Sta. Fe. Nakangiti ito ngayon, especially kapag nagagawi kay Midos ang tingin. “Congratulations hijo. You’ve made us all proud.”

“Shel, proud saan?” She asked Shelby.

“Hindi mo ba alam? Nanalo si Midos sa Intercampus Literary Competition.”

Namilog ang mata nya. “Weh?”

“Oo. Kanina ko nga rin lang nalaman. May pagka-makata rin pala yang boyfriend mo.”

“Hindi ko sya boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend soon.” Nakangiting pahayag nito. She sighed. Hindi yata talaga lilipas ang maghapon na walang nanunudyo sa kanila.

--

“Congratz.”

Midos looked at her. “Para san?” Tanong nito.

“Sa pagka-panalo mo. Ngayon ko lang nalaman na magaling ka palang tumula.”

“Sa tagal nating magka-klase, ngayon mo lang nalaman?”

Umupo sya sa tabi nito. “Eh hindi naman tayo close...dati.”

Umusod ito sa tabi nya at inakbayan sya. “Eh ngayon...close na close na ba?”

Itinulak nya ang mukha nito. “Lumayo-layo ka nga sa’kin at naaalibadbaran ako!”

“Sus! Pakipot.” Natatawa nitong sabi.

Inirapan nya lang ito.

“Seriously though..natutuwa rin akong nalaman mong gusto kita. At least I can openly show you my affection, di ba?” Dugtong pa nito.

Tumaas ang kilay nya. “Akala ko ba bakulaw ako para sa’yo?”

He smirked. “At naniwala ka naman. You’re too pretty to be a monster.”

Her heart thumped with joy. Nakakatuwang isipin na nagagandahan ito sa kanya. “Hindi ako maganda.”

“Pa-humble?”

Umiling sya. “Ikaw lang ang nagsabi sa’kin na maganda ako.”

“Kase naman, lagi kang nakasimangot.”

“Kase naman pasaway ka.”

“KSP ako weh.”

“Halata nga.”

He laughed.

--

Nalalapit na ang graduation. Magkakaroon din ng prom..kaso hindi kasali ang fourth years. Masyado na raw kaseng maraming gastusin. It was the first week of February. Ngayon lang na-realize ni Kyla kung gaano kasikat si Midos . Kabi-kabila ang invitations na natatanggap nito mula sa mga babaeng third year. Pero tinanggihan nito lahat ng iyon.

“Bakit tinatanggihan mo sila?” She asked him once.

“Baka kase magalit ka.”

Somehow, it warmed her heart. “Hindi ako magagalit. Hindi naman kita boyfriend eh.”

“Okay.” Maikli nitong sagot.

--

Bilang pananamantala sa katungkulan ni Kyla, inatasan sya ng mga teacher na mag-organize ng prom. Hindi naman sya makatanggi. Lucky for her, hindi nya na kailangang magbihis ng maganda. Or so she thought.

That night, she felt so out of place. Naka-jeans lang kase sya. But who cares, anyway? Hindi naman sya third year. But still...

Nagulo ang daloy ng pag-iisip nya ng makita ang pumasok ng hall. Trish was wearing a cute, purple gown. Nakakapit ito sa braso ni Midos. The moment she saw him, she wasn’t able to take her eyes off him. Napaka-gwapo naman ata nito. Bakit ba kelangan pa nitong magpa-gwapo? Pinagtitinginan tuloy ito ng mga babae. She wanted to scratch their eyes out!

Pero mas naiinis sya kay Midos. Halatang napilitan lang itong tanggihan ang mga invitations ng mga third year dahil sa kanya. She regretted giving him permission.

Trish didn’t waste her time flaunting her date. Inggit na inggit ang mga babae dito, including her. Drat! Bakit na sya naiinis eh hindi naman sila?!

She saw Midos look her way. Inirapan nya ito.

--

Antok na antok na siya. Maiidlip na sana sya ng biglang i-announce ng teacher ang

prom king and queen. Guess who won the title?---Yeah, you guessed right.

Then it was down to that dance. The king and queen dance. Sa sobrang inis nya, papuslit syang lumabas ng hall at saka nagpunta sa likuran ng school, sa may basurahan. Buti na lang may ilaw. At buti na lang hindi sya takot sa multo. Ghosts won’t even dare bother her anyway.

Kumuha sya ng ballpen at papel sa bag nya at nagsimulang magsulat.

Kung mababasa mo man ito, please give me some advice. There’s this guy na sinasabing gusto nya ‘ko pero nakikipag-flirt pa rin sya sa ibang babae. He even took someone to the prom! Tingin mo ba dapat pa ‘kong maniwala sa kanya?

“Aw putek. Walang tape!” Nagpalinga-linga sya hanggang sa makakita ng bubble gum. Nandidiri man, kumuha sya ng isa pang papel para makuha ito at syang ginawa nyang pandikit.

--

Bumalik sya sa upuan nya at pinanood ang mga nagsasayaw. Then suddenly, someone lend a hand to her. She looked up straight to Midos’ eyes. Nakangiti ito.

“Sayaw tayo?” He looked like a teenage prince. Habang sya..mukhang alalay.

Inirapan nya ito. “Ayoko.”

“Tsk. Di ‘wag.” Nagsimula itong maglakad palayo.

“Hindi ako naka-dress. Nakakahiya.” Pagdadahilan nya. Nilingon sya nito at saka binalikan sa kinauupuan nya.

“Okay lang yan. Hindi rin naman ako naka-dress eh.”

“Hindi ako kasali sa prom.”

Hinila sya nito. “Wala akong pake.”

Wala na syang nagawa. Pinagtitinginan sila ng ibang estudyante pero mukha ngang walang pakialam si Midos. Nakatutok lang ito sa kanya.

“Wag mo ‘kong tingnan.” Saway niya dito.

“Bakit ba? Masama?”

“Oo. Magkakakuliti ka.”

Napatawa ito. “Okay lang. It’s worth it naman.”

“Baka masakal ako ng date mo.”

“Si Trish? Nahhh..friends lang naman kami. Gusto lang nya akong maka-date.”

“Friends ba yung ganun kumapit?!” Napanguso sya sa inis.

He grinned. “Selos?”

“Hindi ah—sinasabi ko lang yung nakikita ko.”

“Nabubulagan ka lang ng selos. Prens lang talaga kami.” Seryoso nitong sabi.

Hinampas nya ang balikat nito. “Aray naman!” Reklamo nito. “Oo na. Hindi ka na nagseselos. Joke lang naman eh.”

--

Matapos ang ilang sayaw ay ihinatid na sya nito sa kinauupuan nya kanina. What surprised her is when he sat next to her. “Dun ka nga sa date mo.”

“Ayoko nga.”

She sighed. “Wag ka nga dito. Ako lang ang pwede dito.” Pilit nya itong itinutulak.

“Kelan pa ‘to naging restricted area ha?”

“Ngayon lang.”

“Aminin mo munang nagseselos ka.”

“Sige upo na.” Tinapik nya nag bakanteng upuan sa tabi nya. Naupo naman ito agad at tahimik na pinanuod ang mga nagsasayaw. Yun nga lang, hanggang sa matapos na ang prom ay hindi na ito umalis sa tabi nya.

After the prom, he even helped her do the rest of her chores. Saka sya nito inihatid pauwi.

--

A few days later, naalala ni Kyla ang sulat na idinikit nya sa pader. Kaya kinahapunan, dali-dali syang naglinis ng classroom at nagtapon ng basura. She smiled when she saw an origami again.

What does your heart tell you? Don’t fail to recognize love. It only comes a few times. And why don’t you ask him then, just to be sure? Para mawala yang mga what ifs sa utak mo, learn to face your fears. I hope I helped. :)

Pagkabasa ay idinikit rin nya ang sulat nya.

Hindi ka nagseselos? He-he. Thanks sa advice pero hindi ko ata kayang magtapat sa kanya. Oo, nagseselos ako. Oo, gusto ko sya. Pero hindi ko alam kung ano’ng mangyayari kapag sinabi ko yun sa kanya. Siguro kelangan ko pa ng maraming time. :DD

--

I’m not jealous. I’m happy that you found someone like Midos. He loves you so much. You should’ve realized that by now. :)

--

Kumunot ang noo nya. She wrote down:

Paano mo nalamang si Midos ang tinutukoy ko?

--

“Aww. Ang cute nung tuta oh.” Nagpunta silang magkakabarkada sa bahay nina Lance dahil weekend movie marathon nila. Tuwang-tuwa sya ng makita ang mga bagong panganak na tuta ng aso nina Lance.

“Lance, akin na lang ‘tong isa.”

Napakamot ng ulo si Lance. “Ano—kase...may may-ari na nyan lahat eh.”

“Ganun ba?” Napamungot sya. “Sayang naman.”

Pumasok na sila sa sala ng tawagin sila ni Shelby. But throughout the movie, hindi nya makalimutan yung tuta.

--

It doesn’t take an expert to know na si Midos ang tinutukoy mo. The whole school talks about you both a lot. Hindi mo nga lang siguro halata dahil hindi rin nila sa’yo ipinapahalata. And by the way..when will you tell him that you like him?

SOON? I don’t know. I’m scared.

She wrote hastily.

--

The bell rang at noon signalling the lunch break. Malapit nang lumabas ng pinto si Kyla ng bigla syang harangin ni Midos. In his hands, he held a stack of papers. Familiar papers. Namilog ang mata nya ng ma-realize nya kung ano ang mga iyon.

“P-pano napunta sa’yo yan?!”

He grinned. “So..gusto mo pala ‘ko?”

“Akin na yan!” Pilit nyang inagaw ang mga sulat sa kamay nito. But being only 5’2” and him being 5’8”..lugi sya.

“Bakit ba? Eh binigay mo na sa ‘kin to.”

“Hindi para sa’yo yan!”

Itinaas pa nito ang kamay ng subukan uli nyang abutin ang mga sulat. “THESE are mine.” Mariin nitong sabi. “They were addressed to me.”

Maang syang napatingin dito.

“I’m Mr. Note.” He declared, smiling.

--

What?

Her heart thumped double time. Ito na ba yung kinatatakutan nyang tapatan? She wanted to run away. She’d never had a boyfriend. Probably because all the boys at school were scared of her. Hindi naman sa hindi sya mabait o maganda..it’s just..maybe because she was so intimidating. An honor student, always a class officer, an athlete and all around A-student, para bang nanliliit ang mga ito sa kanya.

That’s why hindi nya alam ang dapat gawin sa ganitong sitwasyon. She was so used to using her head all the time. When it comes to the matters of the heart, she’s zero. What will she do now? Alam na nito kung ano yung feelings nya..

“O ano? Bakit hindi ka na makapagsalita dyan?”

“B-bakit kase—“

Arrrggghhh!

She sighed three times. Natawa ito sa inasal nya.

“Hindi ko naman akalain na makukuha mo yung sulat ko sa pader.” Panimula nito. “I was just using that wall as an outlet. Nagulat na lang ako ng kinabukasan, nakita kong wala na ang sulat ko. More surprisingly, ikaw pa ang nakakuha. Don’t you think it’s fate?”

“Hindi lang naman ako ang pwedeng makakuha noon ah. Kung nagkataong iba ang nagtapon ng basura—“

“Kaya nga fate eh. Kase pwedeng iba..pero ikaw pa rin ang nakakuha.”

“Hindi rin.”

“Bakit ba parang ayaw mo? Alam naman nating pareho na gusto kita. Gusto mo ‘ko. Ano’ng problema?”

Tumungo sya, unable to meet his gaze.

Ano nga bang problema?

“Bata pa tayo.”

“So?” Kunot-noo nitong tanong. “Ang mama at papa ko, they were together since high school. They were still together. Kaya ‘wag kang magdahilan na bata pa tayo.”

“Bata pa tayo—“ Pilit nya.

“Ang kulit mo rin ano?” Puna nito.

“—kaya pwede pang mabago ‘yan o mawala.”

His face went solemn. “Don’t you trust me?”

“I don’t trust myself.”

He smiled again. “I’m willing to take that risk.”

She felt like she’s just been electrecuted. Pero kase..ang daming ‘what ifs’ sa utak nya. They could be so in love in what..a few years? And then what? It’ll fade. It’ll just fade away.

She sighed. “Nagugutom na ‘ko.”

“May baon akong pagkain.”

“Hindi tayo pwedeng mag-stay dito. Ako mismo ang nagsabing bawal tambayan ang classrooms during lunch break tapos ako pa ang unang-unang susuway?”

“Why don’t you not play by the rules just this once?”

“Hindi pwede.”

“Pwede.” He contradicted.

“Hay! Ang kulit! Sya sige. Kumain na tayo. Mabilisan lang.”

--

“Kayo na?!” Gulat na gulat na tanong ni Shelby kay Midos. “Kelan pa?” Kakatapos lang ng klase nila ng harangin silang dalawa ni Shelby. Apparently, nasabi na agad ni Midos dito ang tungkol sa kanilang dalawa.

“Kaninang lunch break.” Nangingiti nitong sabi.

Hinampas nya ito sa balikat. “Hoy! Ano naman yang pinagsasasabi mo?”

“Bakit? Totoo naman ah?”

Her lips formed a thin line. “Bakit mo pinagkakalat?!”

“So totoo nga?” Nakangiting tanong ni Shelby. Tapos ay bigla syang niyakap nito ng mahigpit. “I’m so happy for you friend.” Nag-init ang mukha nya.

“Wag mo namang ipaglakasan ang boses mo. Nakakahiya..”

Sinapo ni Shelby ang mukha nya. “Bakit ka naman mahihiya? Ito ikakahiya mo--” Itinuro nya si Midos. “—eh ang gwapo-gwapo nyan.”

“Sa’ng banda?” She tried to joke.

“Sa lahat ng banda.” Singit ni Midos. And she didn’t argue.

--

Kakagising pa lang ni Kyla ng marinig na maingay sa sala nila. Dali-dali syang bumangon para tingnan kung anong kaguluhan ang nangyayari. Nagulat na lang sya ng pagkababa nya ng hagdan ay bigla syang sumalubong ng isang cute na cute na tuta.

“Hi.” Nakangiting bati ni Midos.

She smiled too. “San galing to?” Itinuro nya ang tuta.

“Kay Lance.”

“Ah...so ikaw pala ang umagaw ng tuta ko.” She crossed her arms to appear angry..but her smile says otherwise.

Kinuha ni Midos ang tuta . “Tuta natin. Meet Mio.” He referred to the puppy.

Kumunot ang noo nya. “Mio? Pinangalanan mo na agad?”

“Oo. Ayaw mo ba?”

“Paano kung gusto ko eh Midoky?”

“Baduy.”

“Mikyla?”

“Lalaki kaya to.”

“Fine. Mio na nga lang.”

“Sabi ko nga.” He smiled victorious. “Kagigising mo lang no? Ni hindi ka pa nakakapaghilamos o nagsusuklay man lang.” He held the puppy with one hand and brushed her hair with the other.

“Kase naman..ang aga mong mambulabog.”

“Weh. Excited ka lang siguro na makita ako. Noh?”

“Hindi kaya! Baka ikaw!”

“Kasalanan ko bang ma-miss kita?”

She rolled her eyes. “Bolero!” Tumawa ito. “Dyan ka na muna. Maghihilamos lang ako.”

“Wag kang masyadong magpaganda ah. Baka lalo akong mahumaling.”

“Sapak?” Ikinuyom nya ang kamao. Nangingiti syang pumunta ng CR at naghilamos.

--

Days passed by like minutes. “Hindi ako makapaniwalang graduation na bukas.” Bulalas nya.

“Hindi ako makapaniwalang ga-graduate ako.” Natatawang pahayag ni Midos.

Nasa simbahan sila at nagpa-practice ng baccaluareate mass. Nasa kalagitnaan ng

pagsesermon si Mrs. Padua, ang homeroom teacher ng class 4-A.

“San ka magka-college?” Tanong nito sa kanya.

“Sa MAPUA sana ‘pag may pera. Ikaw?”

Huminga muna ito ng malalim bago sya sinagot. “Kelangang idialysis si mama.”

Hindi nya alam na may sakit pala ang mama nito. Kaya siguro palaging lumuluwas ang mama at papa nito.... “Marami namang magagaling na doktor dito, di ba?”

“Mas gusto ni papa sa Amerika.”

“So..dun ka mag-aaral?”

Tumango ito.

“Hanggang kelan?”

“Hanggang sa maging okay na si mama.”

“Pano tayo? Break muna?”

“Hindi!” Tanggi nito. “Kaya yun. Babalik rin naman ako eh.”

“Sigurado ka ba? Pano kung bigla kang main-love doon. Tapos aasa lang pala akong babalik ka pa.”

“Malabo yun.”

“Ngayon malabo. Pero pag tumagal yan, hindi imposible.”

“Bakit ba masyado kang negative?” Naiinis nitong tanong.

“Hindi negative, realistic lang.”

“Bakit ba masyado kang realistic?” Tanong ulit nito. She laughed. Now that was definitely a joke.

--

The graduation ceremony was finished at last. Halos lahat ng mga bagong graduate ay umiiyak, pati sya. Magkayakap silang umiiyak ni Shelby ng lumapit sa kanya si Midos. Hinila sya nito palayo sa karamihan. Sa may pader sa tabi ng basurahan.

“Ano na namang kalokohan ‘to ha?”

To her surprise, he kissed her. Not in a malicious, torrid, adult way. Somehow, her first kiss was innocent. Sincere. Ni hindi man lang nga sya napapikit sa pagkabigla.

“B-bakit mo ‘ko hinagkan?!” Hinampas nya ito sa braso. “Adik ka! Hindi ka man lang nagpapaalam!”

Napatawa ito sa reaksyon nya. “Eto...parang smack lang eh.”

“Kahit na! First kiss ko kaya yun!”

“First kiss ko din kaya yun. Nagreklamo ba ‘ko?”

“Ang kapal mo naman ‘pag nagreklamo ka pa..eh ikaw nga ang nauna.”

Niyakap sya nito. “This will be our last day together. Bukas na kami aalis.”

“H-Happy trip.”

I tried to sound light, as if it doesn’t bother me. Pero parang may bikig sa lalamunan ko. Ayoko namang umiyak. Baka isipin nyang sobrang mahal ko sya. Ayokong isipin nyang hindi ko kayang mawala sya. He might take me for granted.

“I love you.” He said.

It echoed in my brain. What will I say? Thank you? I love you too?

“T-thanks. Ingat ka.”

--

He smiled at her pero malungkot ang mata nito. She knows at the back of her mind that he felt like she rejected him.

If he returns, I will say I love you too,

she promised to herself.

Ang tanong.. babalik pa kaya sya?

==========

When He's Not Looking

“Ang gwapo talaga ni Simon!” narinig kong sabi ng isa kong schoolmate. Simon? Huh... that’s new. Last time yata narinig kong pangalan eh Greg. Last last time pa eh Evan naman.

Ganyan ang pinag-aaralan ng mga schoolmate ko. Lalaki. Kung sino ang gwapo at sikat... ‘wag ka nang masurprise kung kilala nila lahat. Updated sila eh.

Ako?

Nah... I don’t look at guys.

I have this habit of looking straight ahead na kahit nangangabangga na ay hindi ako tumitingin sa taong kasalubong ko. I don’t look at people because it makes me uncomfortable. I don’t look at guys... especially if it’s eye to eye.

Hindi ko alam kung paano ako nasanay pero since fourth year high school ay ganoon na ako.

Kaya hindi ko kilala kung sino ang gwapo, pangit, mataba, babakla-bakla, tatanga-tanga and such. Maganda sya in a way na hindi ako nagiging judgmental sa itsura ng tao. I only look at people when I need too... and that’s almost all the time, which sucks bigtime.

Pero kapag talaga naglalakad ako or if I can help it, deretso lang ang tingin ko.

--

Hindi ko alam kung anong kalakaran ng tadhana. Kailan ba darating sa ‘yo yung isang taong magpapabago ng buhay mo? Hindi ako aware eh.

Basta bigla na lang nangyari.

--

Simon... that’s his name. Hindi ko sya kilala personally kahit tatlong taon ko na syang ka-department. Lately, madalas kong naririnig ang pangalan nya na bukambibig ng mga babae dito sa IT department. Gwapo daw sya... not that I care. Pero sa hindi sinasadyang pagkakataon ay nasilayan ko ang mukha nya.

I didn’t see anything special with his facial features. Yung typical na gwapo... yun sya. Maputi. Matangkad. Matangos ang ilong. Mapungay ang mata. Mapula ang labi. Chiseled ang mukha.

Again... typical.

Ewan ko, wala akong nakitang espesyal sa kanya. Hindi ko nga maintindihan kung bakit sya pinagkakaguluhan eh gwapo lang naman sya. Hindi ko alam kung matalino ba sya o mabait. Hindi ako maka-connect sa kanya kase gwapo lang sya.

Or so I thought...

One time, nag-aaral ako sa kubo na malapit sa canteen namin ng mapadaan sila ng mga kabarkada niya. Hindi ko naman sya inaabangan. Ni hindi ko alam na sya yun. Sa sobrang ingay lang nila, napatunghay ako para tingnan kung sino yung hinayupak na maiingay.

At that same time, sakto naman na tumingin sideways si Simon. Nakangiti sya noon at halatang kakagaling lang sa paghalakhak.

Ewan ko...

There’s something about that smile that captivated me.

Nasundan pa iyon ng isang beses ay may performance ng sabayang pagbigkas sa department namin. Mga first year ang kasali. Hindi na sana ako manunuod kung hindi lang dahil sa kapatid ko na kasali rin.

So nanuod ako. Sabi ko pa sa sarili ko... kahit pagkatapos lang ni Jelu, uuwi na rin ako. Kaso ang masaklap? Sa dami ng enrollees sa IT, ten sections sila all in all. Pangwalo ang klase ng mga kapatid ko.

Ginawa pa akong camera man ni Jelu. Kuhaan ko daw ng video ang klase nila.

Kaya nang nagpeperform yung iba, nag-aantay naman ako sa mismong tapat ng stage. Maraming tao ang nagkumpulan sa court. Mabuti na nga lang at alas-kwatro na. Hindi na masyadong mainit.

Pero mukha naman yatang aabutin kami ng alas sais bago makauwi.

Kakasimula lang kase. Lampas na ng four saka pa lang magsisimula. Filipino time talaga.

Unang sumabak ang section A. Iisa lang ang piece na gagamitin nilang lahat. Mi Ultimo Adios ni Rizal. Para sa Socsci ng third year ang piece na yan. Dapat ay mag-gaganyan din kami ngayon. Ang kaso... yung teacher sa Socsci, handle din ang first year.

Eh maka-Rizal yun. Si Ma'am Salome. Tawag namin dun kabit ni Rizal eh. Ayun... first year tuloy ang nagsa-suffer ngayon. Sa 'min daw naman, skit ang ipapagawa nya.

I guess hindi talaga kami pwedeng maligtas sa kahihiyan na gusto nyang iparanas sa 'min.

By 4:20pm, ipinakilala na ang panel of judges. Then, sinabi na ang mga criteria for judging. By 4:40, nagsimula na ang performance.

Magaling ang section A. Kumpleto sa makukulay na props, malalakas ang pagbigkas at sabay-sabay. Confident halos lahat. Kung meron mang weak members, nadadala na ng lakas ng iba.

Sumunod ang B na medyo flop ang performance. Mga naka-white shirt lang at black pants sila. Tapos may mga kopya pa.

Kung flop ang B, lalo naman ang C. Nagkalat talaga sa stage! Tawanan ang mga nanunuod eh. Pero tingin ko hindi naman talaga sila nag-practice. Kahit sila mismo nagtatawanan.

Nung performance na ng D, umalis muna ako sa pwesto ko para bumili ng maiinom. Matagal-tagal pa naman sina Jelu eh kanina pa 'tong uhaw ko. Iniwan ko muna doon yung ilan kong mga kaklase na nanunuod rin.

Naglakad ako palabas ng department namin papunta sa canteen. Kakaunti na ang tao.

Uwian na rin kase. Sa paglalakad ko, hindi sinasadyang napalingon ako sa kanan. Siguro hinahanap na rin sya ng mata ko... kahit unconsciously.

Nakita ko syang kasama ang mga barkada nya, nag-gigitara sya doon sa may gym.

Akalain mo yun.. magaling pala syang mag-gitara.

--

Third place sina Jelu sa sabayang pagbigkas. First place ang A, second place ang 1-G at pangatlo sila. Pagkatapos ng picture-taking ng buong klase (ako ang photographer) ay umuwi na rin kami ng kapatid ko.

Pero sa dami ng napanuod kong performance at sa dami ng nangyari ngayong araw... isa lang ang tumatak sa isip ko.

Si Simon.. na nag-gigitara.

--

Dumalas ang pagtingin-tingin ko sa kanya. Parang kahit hindi sya hinahanap ng mata ko ay kusa syang nagpapakita. Lumala pa ang lahat... na kahit sa pagtulog ko, mukha nya ang nakikita ko. Minsan namamalikmata rin ako. Basta kahit saan, nakikita ko sya.

One time, biglang kumabog ang puso ko ng akala ko ay sya yung nakita ko sa Jollibee. Same stature kase. Pero pagtingin ko ulit, hindi pala sya.

I began to feel afraid. I got scared of the growing feeling. Ako na mismo ang umiwas. Kapag natunugan kong nasa isang lugar sya, hindi na ako pupunta doon. Kapag alam kong padaan sya sa tinatambayan ko, umaalis ako agad para magtago.

It might have been a different reaction from what others would expect but this is how this works for me. I'd like a guy from afar and then I'd let that feeling die.

Simple.

Sa kalakaran ng buhay love life ko, hindi masamang mag-asam na mawala ang unnecessary feelings towards someone na alam mong wala kang pag-asa. Sure, walang girlfriend si Simon at the time and I might even have a chance at him if I try... pero naisip ko, wag na.

Ganito naman lagi eh. Magkakagusto ako sa isang lalaki. Hahayaan ko lang. Lilipas. Mawawala.

Wala na rin akong problema.

Pero iba si Simon. Hindi ko ma-explain kung bakit... basta kakaiba sya.

When I first saw him and with his preceding reputation, akala ko talaga ay isa syang jerk. Yung tipong mahal lang ang sarili nya at wala ng iba.

At sa kagustuhan kong mapalapit sa kanya, sinubukan kong alamin ang mga bagay at mumunting detalye tungkol sa kanya.

Nalaman ko na kumakanta pala sya sa simbahan. Hindi sya sumasali sa music org ng school. Hindi rin sya kumakanta kapag kasama ang barkada nya. Ni hindi alam ng mga kaklase nya na magaling syang kumanta.

Ang alam lang nila magaling syang mag-gitara.

Sa ibang bayan kase sya nakatira, malayo sa karamihan. It so happened na may dinalaw doon ang nanay ko. Isinama ako nito. Bago kami pumunta sa bahay ng bibisitahin namin, nagsimba muna kami. Linggo kase noon.

Nagulat ako dahil nung komunyon na, nakita ko syang nasa upuan ng choir... kumakanta habang nag-gigitara. Nangingibabaw pa nga ang boses nya eh. It’s raspy and at first won’t seem to suit the solemn feel of the church... but it worked. There’s a different feel to it na hindi ko mawari kung ano.

Another thing na nalaman ko sa kanya is that he loves dogs. I’ve seen him pat and feed one on the street. Hindi yata nya ako napansin noon. How could he nga naman kung nasa likuran nya ako?

Pero dun sa simpleng gesture na yun... natuwa ako sa kanya.

Hindi lang pala sya gwapo.

Weeks have passed and I knew for a fact na may gusto na ako sa kanya. Hindi ko pa naman sya mahal pero papunta na doon. At tingin ko ay malapit-lapit na rin.

Nakilala ko sya through observation.

Never pa kami nag-usap and I doubt if we ever would. Puro assumptions lang ako sa kanya ang pinanghahawakan ko. I assumed na ganito ang gusto nya at ganyan ang ayaw nya. Sa isip ko, nabuo ko yung pagkatao nya based sa mga bagay na nakikita, naririnig at nararamdaman ko.

And I liked the guy he turned out to be inside my head.

I was satisfied and yet I wanted to know him better. Gusto kong hanggang tingin lang pero gusto ko rin syang makausap. Urong-sulong ako. Gusto ko sya pero ayaw ko.

Siguro dahil na rin sa ayaw kong tuluyang mahulog sa kanya in fear that he might not feel the same and yet I wanted to in hope that he might feel the same.

Alam kong magulo. Yan ang problema ko ngayon.

--

You know what’s funny and fascinating? I can tell whenever he’s around. I’d shiver all over na para bang kinikiliti ako ng balahibo ng manok sa batok. And I know where to turn to see him. Astig noh? Parang may magnet na humihila sa atensyon ko papunta sa kanya.

Kaya naman mas lalo akong nahirapang pigilan ang nararamdaman ko. Kaya hinayaan ko na lang. Sabi ko sa sarili ko, Sige, magpakasawa ka kakatingin sa kanya. Hindi naman nya ako nahuhuli dahil hindi naman nya ako tinitingnan.

Sino nga ba naman ako para tingnan nya?

“Simon!” malakas na sigaw ng lalaki sa likuran ko. Agad na kumabog ang dibdib ko ng tumingin si Simon sa gawi ko.

For a fraction of a second, nagtama ang paningin namin.

He held my gaze. I couldn’t look away. Kahit ilang metro ang layo namin sa isa’t isa, tumagos sa ‘kin ang tingin nya.

I felt my heart do its badump dance. Anxious yet ecstatic. What an exhilarating feeling!

Pero ayun nga... wala pa yatang ilang segundo yun. Binawi nya na agad ang tingin nya. Nag-iwas na rin ako ng tingin at bumalik sa pagbabasa. I was still fidgety though... kase feeling ko nakatingin pa rin sya. Nandito kase yung barkada nya sa likuran ko.

At dahil sa naiilang ako, tumayo ako at umalis na lang. Humanap ako ng ibang pwesto.

--

Hindi pa doon natapos ang lahat. I think the only way I can completely ignore him is if I transfer to another school—which will never happen. Masasakal ako ni inay.

One time, maaga akong pumasok. Quarter to seven, nasa school na ‘ko. Napaaga kase ako ng gising. Dahil sa wala akong magawa sa bahay, pumasok na lang ako ng maaga. Magandang lugar ang school sa umaga.

Tahimik.

I was walking down the hallway towards our classroom ng makasalubong ko sya... si Simon. Hindi ko alam kung bakit maaga rin syang pumasok... nataon pa kung kailan inagahan ko.

Naglalakad sya mula sa kabilang dulo ng hallway.

Bumagal ako sa paglalakad. There’s something that I want to say but words sometimes get in the way... Weak in the knees and heart pumping loudly, I stopped on track, leaned on the mini-wall next to me and waited for him to pass.

Nakatungo lang ako... kinakabahan.

Parang nanuyo bigla ang lalamunan ko nang makita ko yung paa nya na tumigil sa harapan ko. Nanlaki ang mata ko noon but I didn’t tilt my chin up... afraid of what I’d see, afraid of what I’d say... afraid of what I’d feel.

“Good morning,” I heard him say.

“G-Go... G-Good morning...” pabulong kong sagot.

Pero nakaalis na sya.

--

Ang pinakamalalang pangyayari? Nagkabungguan kami. Muntik na akong mabara pero nahawakan nya ako sa tigkabilang siko ko. And the electricity? I could light a thousand light bulbs with it.

Nagkatinginan kami.

“Sorry Zelle...” he said.

Nagulat ako. Kilala nya pala ako sa pangalan ko...

Hindi na ako nakapagsalita. Tumango na lang ako basta. He smiled at me and gently let go of my elbows. Tapos ay saka sya nagpatuloy paglalakad. Ewan ko... alam nya na sigurong patay na patay ako sa kanya. And maybe I’m just one of the many who likes him. At siguro nga hindi na yun bago sa kanya.

Sige Simon... ikaw na.

Pero sa kabila nun, masaya ako. Alam ni Simon ang pangalan ko...

--

Fourth year college na kami and yet I still have this feeling towards him. Gusto ko pa rin sya... gustong-gustong-gusto. Magkaklase na kami ngayon at kung noong una ay mahirap umiwas, ngayon ay wala na akong kawala.

Minsan ay nagkakatabi kami sa upuan, nagpapalitan ng papel sa checking ng quiz, nagiging group mates... nagpapasahan ng tagay...

Yung feeling na ako yung kasunod nyang tumagay...

Yung feeling na nakakuha ako ng isang indirect kiss...

Yung feeling na halos mabaliw ako sa kilig kakaisip sa kanya....

Hindi na normal ‘to.

Tumayo ako mula sa kumpulan naming magkakaklase para lumayo. Nag-overnight swimming kami kase birthday ng kaklase kong mayaman.

At ngayon nga, patuloy sila sa pag-iinuman.

“Hoy Zelle, saan ka pupunta?” tanong sa akin ni Seb, yung may birthday.

“Maglalangoy,” sabi ko.

“Mamaya na! Maglalaro pa tayo ng spin the bottle!”

Bigla akong kinabahan. Yang spin the bottle na yan... yan ang temptation na hinihingi ko. At ang alak? Lakas ng loob na kailangan ko. Kung bibigyan ako ng pagkakataong sabihin sa kanya ang nararamdaman ko, malamang sa hindi ay ngayong gabi na yun.

But I don’t want to take the risk. Baka pagkatapos nito, magmukha lang akong katawa-tawa.

“Kayo na lang,” tanggi ko sa kanila. Saka ako nagmadaling naglakad palayo.

Mga limang minuto pa lang siguro akong nakatubog sa tubig ng maakit ako sa mataas na slide na nasa gilid ng pool. Never pa akong nag-try mag-slide kase natatakot ako.

Umakyat ako sa taas noon. Naririnig ko pa silang naghahalakhakan mula sa kinatatayuan ko. Ang saya nila. I looked at the slide before me. I’m scared of the way it slithers... paano kung masyadong madulas at rumagasa ako pababa?

Paano kung mapasama ang bagsak ko at malunod ako?

“Takot ka noh?”

Napahigpit ang kapit ko sa railings nang marinig ko ang boses na yun. Nilingon ko pa rin sya kahit alam kong sya yun. Paano ko malilimutan ang boses nya eh linggo-linggo akong nagsisimba sa simbahan nila para lang marinig ko syang kumanta?

“M-Medyo,” sagot ko.

Ngumiti sya at pumwesto sa slide. Nahiga sya doon habang ang isa nyang kamay ay nakakapit sa dulo.

“Halika dali...” aya nya sa akin.

Umiling ako. “Hindi ko kaya...” Baka mahimatay ako sa kaba kapag nagkatabi kami.

“Kaya mo yan!” pang-e-encourage nya.

Napilitan akong umupo at dahan-dahang pumwesto sa tabi nya.

“Kapit ka sa ‘kin,” utos nya.

Ikinawit ko ang nanginginig kong mga kamay sa balikat nya. I felt his left hand on my waist.

“Ready?” he asked.

Alanganin akong tumango.

Then he let go...

Halos magsisigaw ako sa sobrang takot. But more than that, halos magsisigaw ako sa sobrang kaba. Niyayakap ako ni Simon.

Niyayakap ako ni Simon.

Niyayakap nya ako.

I heard a splash. And then we emerged from the water. I heard them cheer from the side of the pool. Some were taking pictures and videos.

“Kakaiba ka talaga Simon!” sigaw ng isa.

Tumawa si Simon at saka sya humarap sa ‘kin. “Okay ka lang?”

Tumango ako.

He went to the poolside at saka sya umahon. Then he reached for me and helped me out of the pool.

“Ay sayang... walang kiss?” narinig kong tanong ng isa. Muntik na akong matawa.

Pinagsasasabi nila? Kiss? LOL.

Simon laughed as he covered me with his towel. “Magsitigil nga kayo,” saway nya sa mga ito.

“Salamat,” pabulong kong sabi sa kanya.

“Wala yun,” matipid nyang sagot and then he went off to drink with them again.

--

Lumipas ang ilang buwan at sa wakas ay graduate na rin kami. Pagkatapos ng ceremony, agad naghilahan ang mga kabatch ko for picture taking.

“Zelle! Picturan mo naman kami ni Simon!” untag sa ‘kin ng isa kong classmate.

I obliged at saka itinutok ang SLR ko sa kanilang dalawa. Regalo yun sa ‘kin ni mama... at ang unang picture na kukunin ko ay picture ni Simon... at ng gilrfriend nya.

Yeah... it sucks, doesn’t it?

Pero ano namang magagawa ko? Hindi ko naman sinabi sa kanya... Hindi naman din nya ako gusto. Lumipas ang panahon at napakaraming pagkakataon na wala man lang akong ginawa. Ni hindi ako sumubok.

Siguro nga may pag-asang maging kami kung nagsabi ako sa kanya. Malay natin di ba?

Kaso wala eh... naunahan ako.

--

Lumipas ang limang taon at nakalimutan ko na rin si Simon. After college, dalawang taon pa ang ginugol ko para makalimutan sya. At unti-unti naman, nagawa ko. Wala na rin akong balita sa kanya. Kasal na ba sya? Ewan... wala naman akong mapagtanungan.

“Ma’am?”

“Yes?” I asked the waiter na bigla na lamang lumapit sa ‘kin.

“May nagpapabigay po,” nakangiti nitong sabi sa akin. Ipinatong nya sa lamesa ang isang heart-shaped cake and then he gave me a letter.

“Thanks,” I said to him.

When he was gone, binuksan ko ang sulat.

When you weren’t looking, you didn’t see me smile when you smiled.

When you weren’t looking, you didn’t see my heart break when you cried.

When you weren’t looking, you didn’t see my heart fall at the sight of you.

Though you weren’t looking, I knew you felt it too.

Now you’re not looking, I can see it in your eyes.

When I wasn’t looking, it’s you I fantasize.

Now look across, look at me.

Now tell me, what do you see?

Now that I’m looking, I’m feeling a familiar feeling.

Now that you’re looking, I think I know what you’re seeing.

Now we're both looking, I think it's a sign.

Maybe I'm meant to be yours and you're meant to be mine.

“Simon...” nasambit ko pagkatapos ng tula. He was just three tables from me. Nakangiti sya sa akin. He still looks the same... typical.

Yung lalaki na hindi ko tatapunan ng tingin kahit pa ubod ng gwapo.

But he’s just not handsome... he’s Simon.

Ang tipikal na gwapong lalaki na napiling mahalin ng pihikan kong puso. Nakakatawa talaga ang tadhana... pinagtagpo pa kami.

He stood up from his table and walked towards mine.

“May I sit down?” he asked.

“Sure,” I answered.

Maybe this was the chance that I’ve been asking for since third year college. Maybe this is the right time for us. Who knows, right?

Sabi nga nila... love works in mysterious ways...